

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday in Lent, February 18, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 140, 159:1-3, 149, 324:1-4, 46.

Lessons: Psalm 109:1-8, 1 Timothy 6:6-12, Matthew 4:1-11.

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:1-5 and 14-16.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As we begin the Lenten season this year, we jump to the days after Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was widely praised on the day we call “Palm Sunday”.

“When Jesus had finished saying all [the parables and talking about judgment day], he said to his disciples, ‘As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.’ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him ‘But not during the Feast,’ they said, ‘or there may be a riot among the people.’” This was not the first time they had talked about getting rid of Jesus.

Notice it is the leaders: priests, the Sanhedrin, the council. And they got together privately in the palace, the home of the high priest for this meeting, not in their official meeting place. They intended to arrest Jesus slyly, quietly, in some inconspicuous way and then kill him. But of course, as you know, it didn’t work out as a private murder or execution, hidden from the people. Today we see that

THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS FINDS AN ALLY

- 1. The leaders of the Jews plot to finally get rid of Jesus and**
- 2. Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus closest followers, agrees to betray Jesus.**

This has been called the final prediction as Jesus reminded them once more of the conclusion of his work on earth. In two days, on Thursday of this week, beginning with sunset, the Feast of Passover, combined with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, would begin. But this Passover was to be a special Passover.

What Jesus wanted to impress upon his disciples was the fact that he will be delivered up to be crucified, the most terrible death in the catalog of Roman tortures. Jesus warns his disciples again what is going to happen to him. *“Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.’ The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.”* (Luke 18:31–34, NIV84)

From Scripture we can see at least two reasons why these leaders of Jewish religious life were trying to get rid of Jesus.

First, Jesus was saying and doing things which undermined their authority and contradicted the messages they wanted to teach the people. He was preaching forgiveness instead of the law and the man-made rules that the priests and leaders of the Jews had piled upon the people. Jesus was giving the people a new message: the Gospel. People were astonished to hear Jesus’ message, which was a message of the forgiveness of sins given by the grace of God. The people often marveled at him. After all, he had been performing miracles such as healing them of their diseases and raising people from the dead. He had been preaching to them as one who had authority. He was giving them messages from God which they had not been hearing.

On one occasion when the chief priests and the Pharisees had sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus and bring him in, we read **“No one ever spoke the way this man does,’ the guards declared.”** (John 7:45–46, NIV84)

John records that **“the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.”** John 11:57 The enemies of Jesus wanted to get rid of him. But they had to do it in such a way that they would not lose the support of the people. They were afraid of the people if they would try to capture Jesus because Jesus was very popular with the people. After all, he had been performing miracles and preaching to them as one who had authority.

Previously, as we read in John’s Gospel, **“the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. ‘What are we accomplishing?’ they asked. ‘Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.’”** (John 11:47–50, NIV84)

By now they were convinced that killing Jesus was the only solution but they didn’t want to do it **“during the feast”** – the Passover time. They were agreed that Jesus must be done away with. But they didn’t really know when or how they could do this. They didn’t want to do it during the feast because they were concerned there would be a riot. They wanted to do it quietly, so that no one would know. There would be many people coming from Galilee, and some of them were possibly followers of Jesus, and so the priests recognized that to kill Jesus at that time would be dangerous for them. In addition, as we know from secular historians, the Romans always had extra troops on the alert during the Passover.

The second reason is especially meaningful for us. This was his mission – to suffer and die for sin. Jesus’ sufferings and death – and his resurrection – are the reason he came to earth. It was God’s plan to redeem all mankind from the terrible fatal choice Adam and Eve had made to disobey God. It was God’s plan that Jesus **“be handed over to be crucified.”**

But the time and place had already been decided by God. Jesus, the very Son of God, had declared that he would die during the Passover.

So although the people who wanted to kill Jesus decided not to kill Jesus during the feast they forgot about God and his plans. We read in First Corinthians that **“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”** 1 Corinthians 5:7. Because Christ is our Passover lamb, his sacrifice for our sins would be accomplished at the Passover, even though the chief priests and teachers of the law had decided otherwise. We shouldn’t be surprised to realize that God is really controlling things, and men have very little control in this world.

That men have no control – or at least a lot less than they think – is made clear again when what men call ‘a natural disaster’ takes place, be it a blizzard, an earthquake, hurricane, tornado, tsunami or whatever. Jesus goes to meet his death freely and willingly because God is controlling history.

The Word of God stresses that it was not really the cunning and the craftiness of the Jewish leaders which brought Jesus to his death, but it was the will of God, which was also the will of Jesus himself. The Bible also tells us that Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus’ closest followers, agreed to betray Jesus as you heard in our Old Testament lesson from Psalm 109.

According to John’s gospel, it was primarily Judas who raised objections to Mary’s anointing Jesus at Bethany. John tells us: **“Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.’ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. ‘Leave her alone,’ Jesus replied. ‘It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.’”** John 12:3-8

This was a good-sounding excuse, but really, Judas’ heart was filled with greed because he, as what we would call the treasurer of the group, would not now be able to steal even more. It was shortly after this that he contacted the high priests and agreed to betray Jesus for the equivalent of half-a-year’s wages.

Greed was certainly at least one of Judas' motives for going to the chief priests. Had he become disappointed or disenchanted with Jesus? Had he realized that Jesus was not the earthly leader that he expected? Many Jews trusted or believed that Jesus was the one who should deliver Israel from the power of the Romans – that he was a messiah who should reestablish the vast kingdom of David, and lead his disciples on to glory and prestige in an earthly kingdom. But Jesus had not accepted the kind of praise that many of the Jews, perhaps even Judas, wanted to give him as an earthly king.

We read the chilling words *"then Satan entered into Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve."* What a horrifying picture that is! Satan entered into him. He invited Satan into his life; he didn't fight against Satan, but allowed him to come right in. How easy it is to let Satan enter into one's life. Our sinful flesh wants to be entertained by Satan. That's one way he seeks to come even into our lives. Our Old Adam wants to taste of the pleasures Satan offers. That's one way he seeks to come even into our lives. Our Old Man wants to hear stories, and jokes and music, and watch movies that are not edifying or God-pleasing. That's one way he seeks to come even into our lives. Our sinful flesh wants to go to places where Satan holds court, and is glorified by the world. That's one way he seeks to come even into our lives. Greed is one thing that opens the door for Satan to enter hearts. As one of the 12 men closest to Jesus, Judas knew where Jesus would likely go and what kinds of things Jesus would likely do. And Satan entered into Judas and took control of his life.

Satan entered his heart and prompted him to go to the priests. Judas did what he wanted to do. He volunteered to betray Jesus. Jesus had resisted the temptations of the devil in the wilderness. But now Satan saw an opportune time to try again to overcome Jesus. He makes use of Judas to further his diabolical purpose.

So you see that it was greed and personal opportunity to become wealthy in the things of this world that helped lead Judas to betray Jesus Christ. He could only see things of this world. This of course had been foretold in the Old Testament, as we read in Psalm 41:9: *"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."* John reports the fulfillment of that prophecy when Jesus tells us *"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'"* John 13:18

When Judas made his offer, the chief priests *"were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over."* Mark 14:10-11

Judas was not the last of the traitors. Many others would betray and have betrayed Jesus through the ages and thus no longer walked with him. Let us pray never to be of their number!

Judas tried to do what he did privately, secretly. But it has been recorded for all mankind to learn about, to learn from, and to be warned against. For how easy isn't it to betray Jesus? How often aren't there temptations of Satan for us to betray Jesus for even less than 30 silver coins? Perhaps prestige, or "friends", or honor among sinful men?

But Jesus went willingly to the cross to redeem all mankind from sin and especially to redeem you! May that message shine forth during this season when we examine Jesus' work to save us! Amen.