

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS' ENEMIES



By Dann J. Ettner

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS' ENEMIES

A Meditation Series for Lent 2021

by Pr. Dann J. Ettner

Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2021

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Tigard, Oregon

"Better That One Man Die"
The Witness of Caiaphas the High Priest

Invocation

Psalm Verse of Repentance

P: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
C A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Marking of the Forehead with Ashes

Reading Psalm 99

Prayer of the Day

P: Let us pray: Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, in your divine goodness you sent your Son to be our Savior.
C: **Without Jesus we are a people who are perishing in our sins.**
P: With Christ we have been saved from our sins and have the gift of eternal life.
C: **We pray that you would continue to strengthen us in our faith as we look to all the witnesses of Jesus' saving word, even when some of those witnesses happened to be enemies of our Lord.**
P: We pray this through you Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C: **Amen.**

A Reading from 2 Corinthians the 5th Chapter

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Gospel Dialogue and Drama

John 11:47-53

NARRATOR: Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

VOICE: "What are we accomplishing?"

NARRATOR: they asked.

VOICE: “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.”

NARRATOR: Then one of the, name Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up,

CAIAPHAS: “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.”

NARRATOR: He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life (NIV).

THE WITNESS OF CAIAPHAS

My name is Caiaphas. I was the high priest the year Jesus was crucified. I am an enemy of Jesus of Nazareth! The following is my testimony

Who could have blamed me for my opposition against Jesus? I had the support of the scribes and Pharisees. We knew this Jesus as a troublemaker, a person who walked side by side with sinners. He touched the unclean. He ate with tax collectors. He even worked on the Sabbath and he did his magic to make the lame walk and the blind see.

His following of disciples was growing every day. People, brought up in the teaching of the law of Moses, were turning aside and following this man. This, all in the face of Jesus’ mocking of us, our dignity, our laws. He upset our practice of the Temple sales of animals and exchange of coins for the worship and called it a cleansing of his Father’s house.

I could no longer turn a deaf ear to his teachings. Was I not a defender of the law and the guardian of the Temple in Jerusalem? I could see how all of that would have been destroyed if Jesus and his ever-growing band of disciples continued to go unchecked. Suppose that group had foolishly decided to take on the authority of the Roman government? Suppose that the belief, which said this Jesus was the Messiah, the one who had come to save the people of Israel from the Romans, had been heard in Rome? The punishment of the Romans would have been swift and painful to us all. We might even lose the use of our temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus had to be crucified! This one man had to die in order to save our whole nation and our traditional ways from perishing. His death would be for all people!

Those Christians have been saying that my words are some great prophecy. They say that it was God who spoke those words through me.

I way that those Christians have misunderstood me. The salvation I spoke of was the salvation of my ways, my laws, my type of worship. I did not want any of these things to perish.

The salvation the Christians say God intended was the freedom from the curse of the law, the Temple sacrifice, the rituals and ceremonies I grew up with. By sentencing Jesus to die on a cross they say I actually offered the perfect sacrifice which had no spot or blemish: the Lamb of God. Christians say that I played my part well, being high priest that year. Even if in the end that would be true, I want it said for the record that I was an unwilling participant, filled with my own motives and reasons.

This Jesus is now proclaimed as the Redeemer who died for the sins of all people in order that none who believe on his name may perish eternally. They say that the Holy Spirit continues to teach this faith to Jew and Gentiles alike. People are being led to see great truth in my statement of prophecy. Not the truth I taught, rather the truth they say the Holy Spirit teaches. This belief in the salvation of Jesus has taught Christians to reject the need for sacrifices in the Temple because they believe the sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient to cover the sins of the world for all time.

Again, I ask you, who could blame me for the stand I took? This is my testimony. You can either believe me when I tell you this Jesus was a good-for-nothing troublemaker, or you can believe the word of those

apostles of his who teach that this Jesus is the Savior of the world, dying on the cross with a purpose. That purpose was that he might be the ultimate sacrifice, offered on your behalf to save you from your sins. The choice is yours. I made my choice, right or wrong, and must live with it eternally. Will you choose my way, along with the need for animal sacrifices, a careful observation of our laws and rituals, a rejection of this Jesus of Nazareth? Or will you follow this man who claimed he was sent by God to remove all sin with his blood, in order that all who believe in him may not perish, but have eternal life? Let your choice be followed with an “Amen” and a life of service either to me and my way of obeying the law for salvation or to him whom they call the Christ. Amen.

Series Hymn (see back page)

Offering

Prayers

Words of Institution

Lord’s Prayer

Invitation to Communion

Post Communion Prayer

Benediction

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS' ENEMIES

A Meditation Series for Lent 2021

by Pr. Dann J. Ettner

1st Wednesday in Lent

February 24, 2021

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Tigard, Oregon

"They Drew Back and Fell"
The Witness of An Arresting Soldier

Invocation

Responsive Dialogue

1 Corinthians 2

- P: When I came to you, siblings, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God.
- C: **We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.**
- P: For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ crucified.
- C: **This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.**
- P: For who has known the mind of the Lord that the Lord may instruct them?
- C: **But we have the mind of Christ.**

Prayer of the Day

- P: Let us pray: Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, in your divine goodness you sent your Son to be our Savior.
- C: **Jesus went willingly to the cross which he had come to bear.**
- P: No army could have captured him, no one could have taken his life if he had not allowed it.
- C: **Teach us, we pray, to remain in our faith which sees Jesus as the willing sacrifice offered by God for our sake.**
- P: The sacrifice which removes all sin to all those who believe.
- C: **The sacrifice which restores our right to be with our Father in eternity.**
- P: We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C: **Amen**

A Reading from 1 Peter, the 2nd Chapter

1 Peter 2:21-25

Psalms 98

NARRATOR: When he had finished praying, Jesus left with the disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and the disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with the disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them,

JESUS: “Who is it you want?”

PERSON: “Jesus of Nazareth”

JESUS: “I am he”.

NARRATOR: Again Jesus asked them

JESUS: I told you that i am he. If you are looking for me, then let these others go.”

NARRATOR: This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.” Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear (The servant’s name was Malchus). Jesus commanded Peter,

JESUS: Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (NIV)

THE WITNESS OF APARON*, THE ARRESTING SOLDIER

*(*Greek for a cohort of soldiers)*

My name is Sparon. I am from the cohort of soldiers who were assigned to arrest Jesus in the garden. I am an enemy of Jesus the troublemaker. The following is my testimony about what happened that night we arrested Jesus.

I guess I HAD NOTHING PERSONAL AGAINST Jesus. I was only ordered to follow this zealous group of Jews who were saying that this Jesus was making himself king. That, I must admit, did worry me. I knew how these Jews hated us Roman soldiers and we did not share any love for them either. To have one man start calling himself the king of the Jews could be dangerous. What I did not understand was that the Jewish leaders were the ones who drew our attention to this Jesus and were very set on making sure he was crucified. With the way they hated us you would think that they would have allowed this anti-Roman movement to grow. None of that mattered that night, for I hated Jesus because he was a symbol of the Jews, and a man I was allowed to arrest.

On the night of Jesus’ arrest we followed a man named Judas into a secluded part of the garden of Gethsemane. He said it was a “favorite place for his master, “to be”. Actually, now that I think about it, Judas corrected himself and said that it was a “favorite place for Jesus to pray”.

As we approached, we saw some of his disciples asleep and one man standing. The one standing was very direct and did not show any fear. He came right up to us even though we stood there in our Roman uniforms bearing impressive arms against him.

He spoke first and asked us whom we had come for.

“Jesus of Nazareth” we replied in a manner which made it sound as if he were charge. And then it happened. Jesus spoke the words “I am He” and all of us, the entire detachment of soldiers, along with the others who came, all stepped back, as if on cue, and fell to the ground. It was not as if someone lost their balance and worked through the ranks like dominoes. No one ever touched me. I just fell, let go of my sword

and shield as I went down. How it happened, I cannot tell. It would have made a perfect opportunity for that Jesus to escape. But he just stood there waiting for us to stand up and find our swords, torches and lanterns.

Jesus asked a second time, “Who is it you want?” We responded, “Jesus of Nazareth”, almost fearing his response as if the mere mention of his words, “I am he” would make us fall down again.

Some have told me, since that night, that the words, “I am he”, relate back to the old Hebrew name YHWH (pronounced yah-whey) which means, “I Am who I Am”. These same people suggest that Jesus was calling on the powers of the universe by speaking God’s name. Others say that Jesus was, in fact God, speaking God’s name and making everyone fall in an act of humble obedience. I almost believe it, but then why didn’t this Jesus fellow run when he had the chance? Why would someone who had godly powers stand still knowing he would be taken prisoner and then crucified on a cross?

The person we arrested that night could not have been a god. At least not like the great Greek gods I worship. He was too willing to be taken away. He even told his small group of followers to put their swords away. One of my gods would have fought tooth and nail. My god would have called down a power which was not of this earth. My god would have saved themselves even at the expense of all their followers.

Yet, that mysterious fall in the garden still haunts me. What strange power caused that? What unknown force was active that evening? If Jesus were indeed God, as some are now claiming why would he want to save his followers and go and die on a cross? Why didn’t he run the other way and organize an army which might do battle with us Romans? I’m not saying they would have prevailed, but they could have tried.

No, I cannot believe that this Jesus was anything more than one of the zealous Jews who had great claims about the power of their God who had led them through the Red Sea and into the Promised Land. A God like that would have had a better way to save the people than to just die on the cross. I say this even though I have heard some say that Jesus died on the cross on purpose. That fact I almost believe, given the events of that night. But, these same people say that Jesus died as a sacrifice which removes the sins of all those who believe. Knowing what I know about the Jews, I cannot believe this because they are so concerned about the Law. Just look at the Pharisees! They spend their entire lives dedicated to making sure they do everything by the book, the book they say God gave them. Why would God change God’s mind and forgive all their sins without any payment from them? It is just too hard to believe. And so I will not.

You have heard my testimony. I confess the fall we all had in the garden was, ah, “miraculous”, but the rest is only a theory. What do you think?

Series Hymn (See back page)

Offering

Prayers

Lord’s Prayer

Benediction

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS' ENEMIES

A Meditation Series for Lent 2021

by Pr. Dann J. Ettner

2nd Wednesday in Lent

March 3, 2021

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Tigard, Oregon

"What I Have Written, I Have Written"
The Witness of A Member of the Crowd Who Shouted
"Crucify Him"

Invocation

Responsive Dialogue

1 Corinthians 2

- P: When I came to you, siblings, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God.
- C: **We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.**
- P: For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ crucified.
- C: **This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.**
- P: For who has known the mind of the Lord that the Lord may instruct them?
- C: **But we have the mind of Christ.**

Prayer of the Day

- P: Let us pray: Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, in your divine goodness you sent your Son to be our Savior.
- C: **Jesus went willingly to the cross which he had come to bear.**
- P: No army could have captured him, no one could have taken his life if he had not allowed it.
- C: **Teach us, we pray, to remain in our faith which sees Jesus as the willing sacrifice offered by God for our sake.**
- P: The sacrifice which removes all sin to all those who believe.
- C: **The sacrifice which restores our right to be with our Father in eternity.**
- P: We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C: **Amen**

A Reading from Hebrews the 9th Chapter

Hebrews 9:11-15

Psalms 51:1-12

NARRATOR: Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast of Passover to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them,

PILATE: "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

NARRATOR: For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of Him". But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

PILATE: "Which of the two do you want me to release to you"?

CROWD: "Barabbas"

PILATE: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?"

CROWD: "Crucify him!"

PILATE: "Why? What crime has he committed"?

NARRATOR: But they shouted all the louder,

CROWD: "Crucify him!"

NARRATOR: When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.

PILATE: "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility!"

NARRATOR: All the people answered,

CROWD: "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

NARRATOR: Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified. (NIV)

THE WITNESS OF PASOLAOS*

(*Greek for "all the people")

My name is Pasolaos. I was in the crowd the day Jesus was sentenced to die. I am an enemy of that Jesus who upset the temple and the priests. The following is my testimony.

The name of Jesus has become offensive to me and many of my friends. He is better off dead. We did not need his kind around Jerusalem. He was causing too much trouble for us and the priests in the Temple.

First, there was the way Jesus came into Jerusalem. One would think that he were king or something. Even I got caught up with the crowds. We thought that this Jesus had come to rescue us from the Romans, he went to the Temple and caused a riot, throwing over the money-changers' tables and letting the sacrificial animals go at the sellers' booths.

I should have recognized that Jesus would be trouble when the Pharisees asked him to rebuke the cheering crowds as he came into the city and Jesus said, “Even if the crowds were silenced, the stones themselves would sing out.”

The fact that his followers were calling Jesus the Christ further troubled me. I mean the Messiah would have come and worked with the Pharisees, not against them. Even Pilate admitted that Jesus had been called the Christ as he said, “The one they call Christ.” Things had just gone too far.

I quickly learned that Jesus had not come to get rid of the Romans; he had come to get rid of the Pharisees and priests. Jesus was mocking my religion and leaders whom I had always looked up to.

When the chief priests and elders came to us and asked us to request the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus, we gladly obeyed. I mean why would we not obey our spiritual leaders? We know how notorious Barabbas was. What could we do? Releasing Barabbas was the least of the two evils. And with the chief priests and elders telling us that Jesus must be crucified, the decision became clear.

I realize that I knew little about why Jesus should die. I did not know what he had done wrong. I left that up to the authorities of our faith. I had heard that Jesus had done many miracles and good things. But if they were really so good, why did our leaders want Jesus to be killed? I realized that there had to be something much more to this Jesus. Something I could never comprehend.

Then Pilate said that he did not want to have anything to do with the death of Jesus. He washed his hands in front of us all. That action told us all that we had to take the responsibility on ourselves. If the Pharisees, the chief priests and even the elders were all for the death of Jesus, then surely God would be for it.

If God were for the death of Jesus then we could safely say that his blood could rest on our heads and even on the heads of our children. How could anyone condemn us for what we had to do? Caiaphas himself had said that Jesus’ death would be for the sake of the whole nation. What I did that day I am still proud of. I am glad to have his blood on me and my children.

The funny thing is that the Christians are saying about the same thing! They say that Jesus’ blood was shed for them. “Let the blood of Jesus be on us and our children.” They say it as if it were a confession of faith. These Christians reject the sacrifices which our priests offer and say they are forgiven in the blood of Jesus which was shed according to God’s plan.

Some Christians suggest that our cry to let his blood be on us was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They say that if we believed in Jesus as the Lord and Savior, as the Messiah, we would have the forgiveness of God through Jesus’ sacrifice forever. How can I believe that the words we shouted in anger and frustration could be the words of the Holy Spirit? How can I believe that this man who came to speak against the chief priests and elders could have come from God?

No, I’m set in my decision. I am responsible for the death of Jesus. If it is because of my sin, as the Christians say, then so be it. I could not have done it any other way. I am convinced that Jesus had to die. His blood is on my hands but I will not let it touch my heart as those Christians have. Those are the only two choices I see possible. Where do you think the blood of Jesus belongs? On my hands or on your heart?

Series Hymn (See back page)

Offering

Prayers

Lord’s Prayer

Benediction

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS' ENEMIES

A Meditation Series for Lent 2021

by Pr. Dann J. Ettner

3rd Wednesday in Lent

March 10, 2021

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Tigard, Oregon

"What I Have Written, I Have Written"

The Witness of Pilate

Invocation

Responsive Dialogue

1 Corinthians 2

P: When I came to you, siblings, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God.

C: **We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.**

P: For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ crucified.

C: **This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.**

P: For who has known the mind of the Lord that the Lord may instruct them?

C: **But we have the mind of Christ.**

Prayer of the Day

P: Let us pray: Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, in your divine goodness you sent your Son to be our Savior.

C: **Jesus went willingly to the cross which he had come to bear.**

P: No army could have captured him, no one could have taken his life if he had not allowed it.

C: **Teach us, we pray, to remain in our faith which sees Jesus as the willing sacrifice offered by God for our sake.**

P: The sacrifice which removes all sin to all those who believe.

C: **The sacrifice which restores our right to be with our Father in eternity.**

P: We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen**

A Reading from Revelation the 19th Chapter

Revelation 19:11-16

Psalm 24

NARRATOR: From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting!

CROWD: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar”.

NARRATOR: When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour.

PILATE: “Here is your king”,

NARRATOR: Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted,

CROWD: “Take him away! Take Him Away! Crucify him!”

PILATE: “Shall I crucify your king”?

CHIEF PRIEST: “We have no king but Caesar”,

NARRATOR: The chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jew read the sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate,

CHIEF PRIEST: “Do not write ‘the King of the Jews’, but that this man claimed to be the king of the Jews”.

NARRATOR: Pilate answered.

PILATE: “What I have written, I have written”. (NIV)

THE WITNESS PILATE

My name is Pontius Pilate. I was the Roman governor of Judea at the time of Jesus of Nazareth. Even though I could find nothing wrong with Jesus I still call myself an enemy of Jesus the Galilean. The following is my testimony.

My first contact with this Jesus was early on the morning they crucified him. At first I was concerned that they had brought a serious criminal to have me judge. Part of my job was to sit as a judge before the matters which affected the people and their relationship with Rome.

I quickly realized that it was out of jealousy and envy that these chief priests and Pharisees had brought Jesus before me. They were afraid that he would attract some of their followers away from them. People were starting to believe that what Jesus said was better than what those chief priests were saying. I almost found it humorous. That was one way to get rid of the competition. “Have him killed,” they shouted. Why should I judge a case like this? I almost thought I could get out of it by sending him to Herod. After all, he was from Galilee. Should not Herod judge him?

For some reason Jesus was returned to me and I was asked to make a decision. All I could do was to question the man seriously. On the whole he would not speak to me. He only stared at me as if he pitied me. I

told him of the power I had over him, but he only said that all my power came from his Father in heaven. If his Father was in charge like he suggested, why did his Father let me sentence Jesus to death? He was king of another world.

It was this statement of being a king which was repeated by the Jews as a just reason for Jesus's death. Now I have been governor in Judea too long to be taken by that line. The Jewish leaders could care less that Jesus was calling himself king. They only used that as leverage before me. I saw no harm in having this insignificant carpenter say he was a king of another world. It may have shown some ignorance on his part but it certainly was not reason enough to die. I sought desperately for a reason to release Jesus. This especially after the message that my wife was suffering visions about Jesus and wanted me to have nothing to do with him. I tried to tell them that Jesus was not worthy of death. I even put the prisoner Barabbas up as a way of getting them to allow Jesus to be set free. I would have bet that they all would have forgotten their pettiness if they were faced with the possibility that Barabbas would be set free if they did not. My plan backfired, however. They were set on having Jesus crucified. And Barabbas went free.

They finally forced my hand by suggesting that they would let Caesar know that I had not done anything to destroy a person who tried to set himself as King in Caesar's place. I knew that Jesus was no threat to Caesar, but what could I do? What would Caesar think of me?

So, still rejecting the responsibility, I washed my hand before them saying they were free to crucify him if they still wanted to. I had him flogged first, hoping that maybe they would see him suffer and be satisfied and not go through with the crucifixion.

Angered by the fact that I had been forced into this action, I decided to humiliate the Jews by having a sign made for his cross. To make sure everyone got my message, I had it written in the three common languages of the day. It said very simply, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". I knew this was a spiteful thing to do so I was not surprised when the Jews came running back objecting to my action and words. They wanted me to change it to, "he said he was the King of the Jews." I merely responded, "What I have written, I have written". It was my way of getting back at them.

I thought that I would not have to hear about this Jesus fellow ever again after that day. I guess I was not surprised when they wanted his tomb guarded for fear that his body would be taken and then the Christians would claim that he has risen from the dead.

"Jesus did rise from the dead", the Christians are saying. "Jesus is not only the king of the Jews, but of all people", the Christians proclaim. All I hear now is a constant battle between what the Jewish leaders say and what this growing number of Christians say. Some Christians are even suggesting that the sign I hung over Jesus's head was according to the will of God. I cannot understand how something I did in spite could be seen as an act of God. How can those Christians be so blind as to worship a man who was killed on a Roman cross and now lies in some forgotten grave?

I will never understand this Jesus. I will never understand why he even had to die. I will never understand why I was pushed into doing what I did when my wife begged otherwise. How can you ever understand a man who just looks at you with pity when you suggest you have the power of life and death in your hand? How can you understand a man who has become more important in death than in life? How can you understand a man who would not save himself?

I do not understand. I don't think I ever will. I ask you, do you know why his wanting to be King of the Jews was important enough to die for?

Series Hymn (see back page)

Offering

Prayers

Lord's Prayer

Benediction

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS' ENEMIES

A Meditation Series for Lent 2021

by Pr. Dann J. Ettner

4th Wednesday in Lent

March 17, 2021

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Tigard, Oregon

"Surely He Was the Son of God"

The Witness of the Centurion

Invocation

Responsive Dialogue

1 Corinthians 2

P: When I came to you, siblings, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God.

C: **We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.**

P: For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ crucified.

C: **This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.**

P: For who has known the mind of the Lord that the Lord may instruct them?

C: **But we have the mind of Christ.**

Prayer of the Day

P: Let us pray: Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, in your divine goodness you sent your Son to be our Savior.

C: **Jesus went willingly to the cross which he had come to bear.**

P: No army could have captured him, no one could have taken his life if he had not allowed it.

C: **Teach us, we pray, to remain in our faith which sees Jesus as the willing sacrifice offered by God for our sake.**

P: The sacrifice which removes all sin to all those who believe.

C: **The sacrifice which restores our right to be with our Father in eternity.**

P: We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen**

A Reading from Romans the 5th Chapter

Romans 5:12-19

Psalm 2

NARRATOR: And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of the many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus's resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed,

CENTURION: "Surely he was the Son of God". (NIV)

THE WITNESS OF HEKATONTARKOS*, THE CENTURION

(*Greek for Centurion)

My name is Hekatontarkos. I was the centurion in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Even though this was just my job, I was an enemy of Jesus. The following is my testimony

My task, by the order of Pilate, was to take this Jesus, have him whipped and crucify him on the Roman cross. I was never asked to judge this man, for that had already been done by Pilate. I had merely to carry out my orders.

Now it is true that I allowed the soldiers under me to mock and make sport of Jesus. I saw nothing wrong with their making a crown of thorns and pounding it on His head. After all, he was a condemned man who was about to die. The crown of thorns and the pulling out of his beard was done by my men as a way to release some of the stress and hatred for the criminals we dealt with every day.

The difference was that this one did not talk back. Maybe that was why my soldiers kept on. Maybe they were looking for a reason to hate this man they were taking to crucify. Maybe they were just dumping all of their anger, hatred, and sin on this one man who seemed to be able to take it.

Nailing this man to the cross was part of my orders. I realize that death by way of a roman cross was a very painful, even a cruel way to die. Who was I to judge whether or not he was worthy of this type of death? Fortunately for Jesus he did not have to hang there long. Many of the prisoners hang in pain and suffering for more than a day. Jesus died after only six hours on the cross. His death became a blessing as far as I was concerned.

After we hung him on the cross he continued to show a calm, almost loving, spirit toward us, his executioners. First there were his words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Can you imagine why anyone would want his executioners forgiven? He was an extraordinary man. He even made sure that his mother was cared for as he assigned a friend to take her as his own mother.

This Jesus was even able to change the attitude of one of the other criminals who was hanging on a cross next to him. Jesus said that this man would be in paradise with him. I do not know what that meant but I could see how it affected this person from then on out. He no longer spit out insults and curses to us as we stood looking up at him. We all commented on his unusual peace even in the face of death.

The last words of Jesus will always ring in my ears. He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". I don't know if it was because of the beautiful calmness that filled his whole being as he spoke those words and died, or because of the events which followed, that has left those words printed on my brain. There was a horrible noise and the earth began to shake. Rocks merely spit in two as if by command. They are even saying that tombs broke open and the people in them came back to life and went into the city. I cannot even call this a coincidence because of the events which led up to it. As Jesus hung on the cross, and unearthly darkness covered the whole land as if Jesus himself had ordered it. Then the darkness lifted, Jesus breathed his last and the earthquake shook the land all in one instant.

The effect was so great that I found myself saying, "Surely he was the Son of God". I did not plan to say it. I realized at that moment that I had done something which was against God. I had crucified God's own Son. As far as I was concerned I had crucified God's own self. If only I could turn the clock back. Maybe I could

have saved him .Maybe I could have rebelled and kept this righteous man alive. I do realize that if I had spared his life that I would have faced certain punishment and death.

The Christians are now saying that Jesus had to die, that he really wanted to die. They say he did this in order to become a ransom for his people. I have even heard it said that I spoke the truth when I said, “Surely he was the Son of God”. They say that I proclaimed the fact that Jesus was God, sent by the Father to become the perfect sacrifice for sins. And because he died on the cross all who believe in him will live forever with God.

This is a hard thing to believe. I do know that there was something very different in the man Jesus. I even believe that he was responsible for the darkness over the land, the earthquake at his death and even the report about the dead coming to life. But I cannot understand, nor do I believe that this Jesus was a sacrifice offered for all people. Sin in this world is just too great. And sin must be punished. I know that all too well as a veteran Roman officer. You judge for yourselves: if Jesus was the Son of God, as I suspect, could his death pay the penalty for all our sins? It would take a power greater than reason to le me believe that.

Series Hymn (see back page)

Offering

Prayers

Lord’s Prayer

Benediction

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS' ENEMIES

A Meditation Series for Lent 2021

by Pr. Dann J. Ettner

5th Wednesday in Lent

March 24, 2021

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Tigard, Oregon

"They Reported What Had Happened"
The Witness of a Grave Guard

Invocation

Responsive Dialogue

1 Corinthians 2

- P: When I came to you, siblings, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God.
- C: **We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.**
- P: For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ crucified.
- C: **This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.**
- P: For who has known the mind of the Lord that the Lord may instruct them?
- C: **But we have the mind of Christ.**

Prayer of the Day

- P: Let us pray: Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, in your divine goodness you sent your Son to be our Savior.
- C: **Jesus went willingly to the cross which he had come to bear.**
- P: No army could have captured him, no one could have taken his life if he had not allowed it.
- C: **Teach us, we pray, to remain in our faith which sees Jesus as the willing sacrifice offered by God for our sake.**
- P: The sacrifice which removes all sin to all those who believe.
- C: **The sacrifice which restores our right to be with our Father in eternity.**
- P: We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C: **Amen**

A Reading from 2 Timothy the 1st Chapter

2 Timothy 2:8-10

Psalm 118:14-24

NARRATOR: The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate and said,

CHIEF PRIEST: “Sir, we remember that while he was still alive that t deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again’. So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first”.

NARRATOR: Pilate answered,

PILATE: “Take a guard. Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how”.

NARRATOR: So, they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. Early on the third day, after the earthquake, while the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them,

CHIEF PRIEST: “you are to say, ‘his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep’. If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble”.

THE WITNESS OF KUSTODIAS*, THE GRAVE GUARD

(*Greek for Guard)

My name is Kustodias. I am an enemy of Jesus, the man whose tomb I was ordered to guard. The following is my testimony.

I suppose that I must start at the beginning of my curious story. I was doing my assigned duty in the city of Jerusalem when those chief priests came to me with a curious order from Pilate. They told me that I was to join some other soldiers in order to guard the tomb of a man who had just been crucified. The man’s name was Jesus. The whole thing seemed fishy because this was now the Jewish Passover and we did not expect to see any Jews around because of their Law. It was even more curious to see these chief priests all worked up and wanting us to hurry to the tomb.

This was the first time I had ever been asked to guard a tomb in my military career. As humbling as that task was I knew that I had to take it seriously because of the Governor Pilate’s order.

We went out to the site of the tomb and checked inside to make sure there was a body to guard. The chief priest had explained that the Jewish leaders feared Jesus’ disciples would come and steal the body away and claim that he had come back to life.

After having checked and made sure that the body of Jesus was inside, we rolled the stone back in place and put a seal between the stone door and stone entrance of the tomb. This seal was not placed there to keep anyone out. It was just there to let us know if anyone tampered with the door.

Saturday passed without incident as we guarded the tomb as ordered. During the night we assigned sleeping shifts between the soldiers who were with me. I was able to sleep in the early shift and so was awake during the early hours of the morning.

After I awoke I remember going over and checking the seal. It was still intact. No one had tampered with the door. The morning hours were quiet and uneventful. It was not until the first morning light began to fill the sky that it happened.

There was a violent earthquake and an unearthly being came down from the sky. It was bright as light and wore clothes that were the whitest white. It moved immediately to the tomb and without effort rolled the stone back and sat upon it.

I was so startled and became so fearful of this event that I shook and fell down wishing death would come to me quickly. I just knew that this unearthly being would strike me next.

It was some time before those with me and I even dared to move. When we did we realized that we could not report this event to our centurion. It was too hard to believe. No one would believe that a being from heaven had come down and rolled away the stone. At the same time we had to do something because the tomb was open, the body was not there, and we would be held responsible and punished, possibly even killed for our failure.

We knew that the events involved religion and things of God and so we decided that we would share everything which had happened with the chief priests who had asked for the tomb to be guarded in the first place.

We went to the chief priests and explained how we had felt the earthquake and seen this being, which they said must have been an angel. We told them how the body of Jesus was no longer in the tomb. We explained how it was “the angel”, as they were called, who was responsible.

The chief priests, with apparent grief and worry on their faces went and spoke with the Temple elders. They came back to us carrying a bag of coins. “Take this money”, they said, “and tell others that you fell asleep as you watched and that Jesus’ disciples came and took his body away”.

We realized that this was a dishonest bribe, but what else could we do? If we told the truth to the centurion, we would be mocked and punished for our apparent unfaithfulness. The only way out of it was to say we all fell asleep and saw nothing. Normally this would be a crime in itself which would be punished. We had to trust that the chief priests would keep their word and make things right with Pilate if word got to him or our sleeping on the job.

After I thought about it I wondered why I could even trust those chief priests when they had been willing to lie in order to get their way. It did not matter in the end, however, because Pilate never asked us to give an account of what we had done and seen. We left that day a little richer, yet a little more curious about the event which happened that early Sunday morning.

Christians are now proclaiming that Jesus did rise from the grave and has been seen among them. Knowing what I know, I could almost believe that. I feel badly that some people are believing my lie. They are being denied the opportunity to believe that Jesus might actually be raised from the dead as they say he proclaimed before his death.

What this would mean, I do not know. I only know that I saw what I saw and ask for your forgiveness for not standing by the truth. I only hope that truth is greater than deception and lies. For if it is, even my lies of the past will be seen for what they really are someday. What about you? Would knowing what I know help you in your faith?

Series Hymn (see back page)

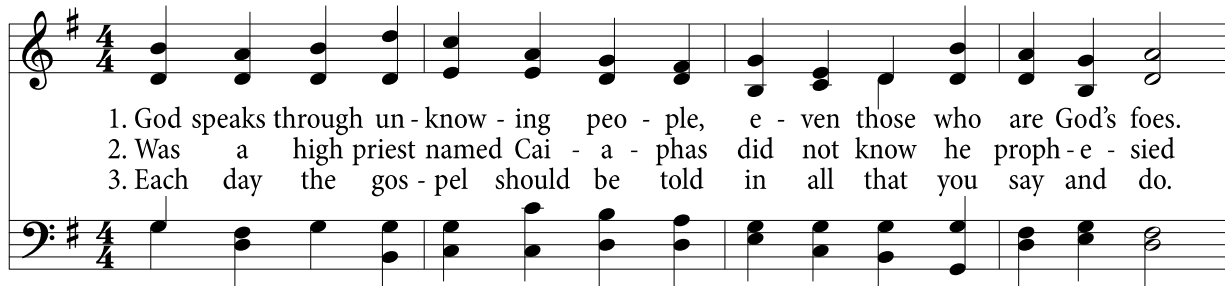
Offering

Prayers

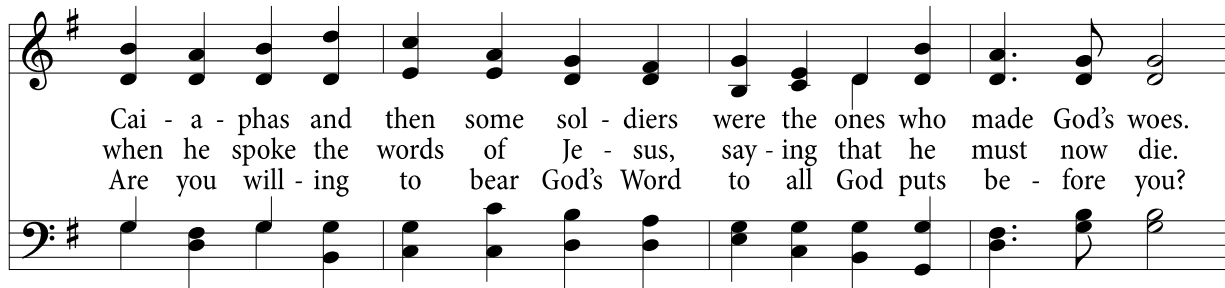
Lord’s Prayer

Benediction

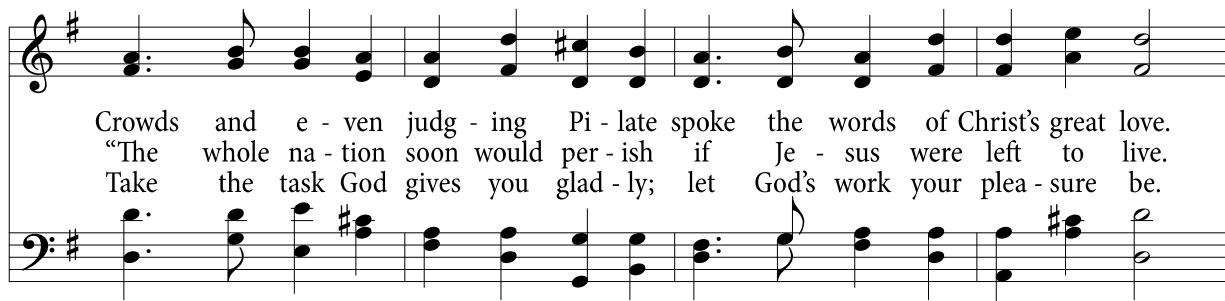
God Speaks through Unknowing People



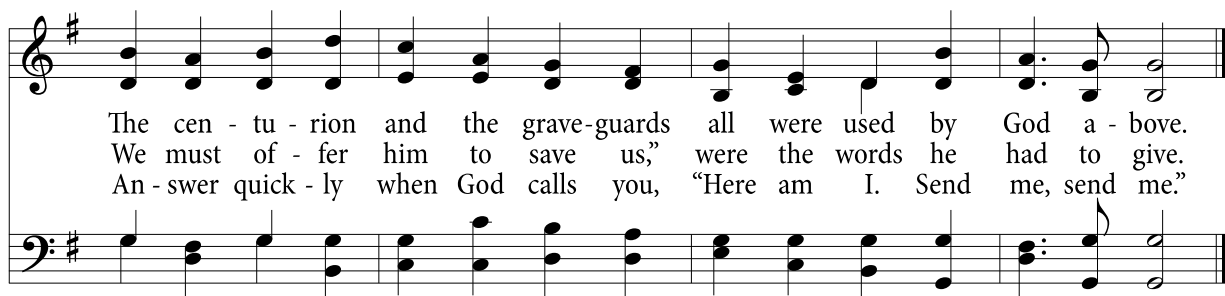
1. God speaks through un - know - ing peo - ple, e - ven those who are God's foes.
2. Was a high priest named Cai - a - phas did not know he proph - e - sied
3. Each day the gos - pel should be told in all that you say and do.



Cai - a - phas and then some sol - diers were the ones who made God's woes.
when he spoke the words of Je - sus, say - ing that he must now die.
Are you will - ing to bear God's Word to all God puts be - fore you?



Crowds and e - ven judg - ing Pi - late spoke the words of Christ's great love.
"The whole na - tion soon would per - ish if Je - sus were left to live.
Take the task God gives you glad - ly; let God's work your plea - sure be.



The cen - tu - rion and the grave - guards all were used by God a - bove.
We must of - fer him to save us," were the words he had to give.
An - swer quick - ly when God calls you, "Here am I. Send me, send me."