

Scripture Reading:

Luke 23: "13 Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, 14 said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; 15 no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. 16 I will therefore chastise Him and release Him" 17 (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). 18 And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas"-- 19 who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder. 20 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. 21 But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" 22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go." 23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

"The Innocent One is Condemned"

In our liturgy and music this week, we are celebrating Pentecost Sunday where we remember the fulfillment of our Lord's promise to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who was poured out in power on the Church after the ascension of Jesus to His Father's right hand. Our teaching focus on Pentecost this year will come in our study of the Book of Acts in a few months. Another challenge for me comes with the fact that most of the great passages which clearly proclaim what happened in the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus are in the Book of Acts! I will try to bring in other Scriptures so we are not covering the same ground again when we study Acts, but I can assure you we will come back to these important final events in the Gospels MANY times!

- We are moving through Luke's orderly account which is where I will focus again this morning.
- However, the Holy Spirit whose coming we celebrate this morning, gave us not one but FOUR Gospel accounts of these events.

I have included the four parallel accounts again this morning in the order of worship to help us see the bigger picture and to encourage your further study of these accounts. As we have moved through Luke's orderly account I have made the case that he clearly shows Jesus being tried before three courts, where in the end these accusers are tried and found wanting by Jesus Himself.

- Now Luke summarizes the trials of Jesus with Him back in front of the Roman Governor Pilate and he wants to make sure we do not miss the point that Jesus is the innocent one who is being wrongly condemned!

This is exactly what the Law and the Prophets had said would happen AND what was needed...

- Jesus had come to Jerusalem at His appointed time to save His people from their sins
- This could only be accomplished by the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God who had been promised since man left the Garden of Eden

When we consider all four Gospel accounts together it is very clear that both the Jews and Gentiles were responsible for the death of Jesus.

- Since we are Gentiles, it is good for us to be working our way through Luke because he focuses on Pilate, where we will spend our time this morning...

The first thing that should have jumped out in our reading is that Pilate declares Jesus to be innocent, not once, not twice... BUT 3 times

- Luke tells us Pilate declares for the third time, “I have found no reason for death in Him!”
- The innocent one is being condemned and will be crucified

This is the power & the offense of the Gospel: The Good News! God is laying the punishment for our sins on His own innocent Son... Paul says it is the aroma of life to those who are being saved, and the stench of death to those who are lost

- The Good News that is proclaimed at this Table by Saints around the world each Lord’s Day with thankful hearts.
- The same Good News that is attacked viciously by those who reject God, both outside and sadly inside of the Church.

The atheist of the hour, Christopher Hitchens says the idea of God punishing His son for our sins is barbaric and some in the emergent church regard it as child abuse.

- THEY understand what the Gospel is and have rejected it because of their human pride...
- As Cain did just outside the Garden of Eden, where in his pride he brought the fruit of his hand as an offering to God.

As God’s children we rejoice at this Good News just as Abraham did when he saw the ram in the thicket that would give its life in place of his son Isaac, picturing what Jesus was about to do for ALL of His people!

- What we see here before the judgment seat of Pilate, is the spotless Lamb of God being condemned in our place!

Pilate comes out from His first examination of Jesus in the Praetorium and gathers “the chief priests, the rulers and the people before his judgment seat.

- One thing we should notice is that the ‘mob scene’ is growing.
- The first examination of Jesus took place quietly before dawn before the former Chief Priest Annas.
- At daybreak, Jesus was brought before the entire Sanhedrin and then sent to Pilate
- Pilate examines Jesus and then sends Him to King Herod
- Herod mocks Jesus and has now sent Him back to Pilate

The news of what was happening would have spread as Jesus was moved from place to place and I am pretty sure all those in Herod’s court would have now come before the judgment seat of Pilate.

- Only God knows the hearts of men, but we certainly see the fickleness of the crowds that Luke has often shown us who just came for the show. Many who were caught up with the Hosanna’s of Sunday now cry crucify him!

Once again Luke is the shortest of the four accounts and he clearly focuses on Pilate...

- We see Pilate to be in reality a very weak man

He has found Jesus to be innocent and yet he tried to compromise with the religious leaders and growing mob rather than standing behind his own judgment

- In the end Pilate completely capitulates to their demands.

When we consider all four Gospel accounts together we see that Pilate refused good counsel from all quarters regarding what should be done with Jesus

- First his own examination established the innocence of Jesus, which he declared three times.
- Pilate dismisses what Jesus Himself proclaimed to him before and after this return to the judgment seat

-- We saw two weeks ago how Jesus had presented Himself as the King of Kings, which Pilate dismissed with the very modern excuse of "what is truth?"

-- John also tells us that when the Jews said Jesus had made Himself the Son of God that Pilate became afraid once more and returned to the Praetorium to examine Jesus again: It is here that Jesus tells Pilate he has NO power over Him that has not been given to Him by His Father.

-- We know from Matthew's account that Pilate's own wife also tried to warn him by relating what God had shown her in a dream about Jesus

- None of this gave Pilate the courage or wisdom to do the right thing and release Jesus because He was innocent

Instead, Pilate did what men often do when trying to work things out with their own strength or wisdom...

- First he looked for some compromise or a way out of the spot he was in...

Pilate declares that Jesus is innocent, but then he goes on to say that he will scourge Him and release Him. Scourging was a cruel Roman punishment where men were beaten with leather straps filled with bits of bone and metal to tear the flesh. There is NO justification for doing this to an innocent man, but Pilate hoped it would win over the crowd and avoid having to crucify Jesus

- When Pilate sees that this will not change their minds, he offers to release Jesus as a 'guilty' man as was the custom during the Passover feast

This custom itself was an offense to God where justice was ignored to win the favor of the people, but Pilate attempts to take advantage of it in this case... He tried to make it a sure-thing by offering a notorious criminal as the alternative to Jesus so the people would be sure to choose Jesus!

The depravity of man is always shocking to see and we see it clearly with those crowds this day...

They cry, "Away with this Man and release to us Barabbas!"

- Now we see why Jesus wept over Jerusalem as He entered the City on Palm Sunday
- They not only wanted to condemn and kill the innocent one, but cried for the release of a murderer with no penalty for his sin...

This should not shock us because we often see people refuse the help that God offers freely, for the love of their own sin! Their vain hope is that they too will somehow be released like Barabbas without facing the consequences of their sin.

- A lesson we should learn here from these actions by Pilate is that there is no compromising with the devil or our own flesh...

Satan is always ready and willing to steer us in the wrong direction and our flesh is quite willing to go along, even when it brings about our own destruction:

As the Proverb says, “ he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death.”

- Demonstrating the vanity of trusting in politics for salvation: Pilate now completely succumbs to the crowds...

The man Jesus, who he had determined had done no wrong was now handed over to be crucified...

- The innocent one is condemned

In one final desperate attempt to free himself from this mess Pilate tried to wash his hands of the whole affair... *Explain what happened.* The one who was responsible to maintain justice then said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.”

Once again, Pilate declares that Jesus is innocent, but then hands Him over to be crucified.

- No amount of hand-washing will remove his sin...
- This futile action should remind us of all the attempts that men make to solve the problem of sin...

They vainly hope that by doing some rituals or a few good deeds they will somehow cover up what they have done wrong...

- They try Yoga, or meditation, or even education to somehow try and remove the guilt of their sin
- There are those who become very religious, like many of the Jews at this trial who trusted that God would be pleased with their Passover sacrifice the next day after killing His own Son

Such is the futility of man’s efforts... In our pride, we quickly see it in others but are often blind to where we do the same ourselves. We may not get a bowl of water out and wash our hands...

- But some might put a little extra in the offering plate on a Sunday where they are feeling guilty about something they have done
- A child might offer to set the table on a day when she has been disrespectful to her mother hoping it will make things better
- A husband might bring some flowers home on a day when he had insulted his wife in the morning hoping it would change the subject or at least smooth things over a bit

Now there is nothing wrong with flowers, or chores or bringing our tithes and offerings, BUT none of these good works can do anything to solve the problem of sin or even the affects wrought by our sin.

- As offensive as it is to our prideful human nature, the problem of sin is ONLY dealt with here at the trial of Jesus...
- The innocent one must be condemned in our place

The innocent one must go on to face not only the physical torment of scourging and crucifixion, but must take upon Himself the wrath of God that was due our sin, where we will see Him cry out, ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!’”

We cannot excuse our sin, we cannot cover up our sin and we certainly cannot ignore our sin...

- We must take it to the cross confessing with King David to the Lord, that against Him and Him alone we have sinned and done great evil in His sight.
- Then we can claim the promise of forgiveness that is based on the work of His Son Jesus.

God is able to be the just one who justifies even wicked sinners like us!

In the end, that poor weak governor of Rome, was used as God’s instrument:

- In this case Pilate’s role was to declare that Jesus was innocent and then to go on to condemn the innocent one so He could be sacrificed as the Spotless Lamb of God!

In the history of His People we have seen God often use civil rulers to accomplish His purposes...

- Where the Pharaoh of Egypt was used to demonstrate the power of God to deliver His people
- Where King Nebuchadnezzar was used by God to punish His chosen people taking them into captivity
- Where King Cyrus was used to declare that God’s people were to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and walls to prepare the way for the coming Messiah
- Where the Book of Ester shows civil magistrates being used by God to protect & prosper His people

And now Pilate who has provided the means for God to fulfill the first promise made to our fallen race...

- With the crucifixion of Jesus, demanded by the Jews and ordered by the Roman Governor we see Satan able to bruise the heel of Jesus, but in the end having his own head crushed by the seed of the woman!

The spotless Lamb of God who was pictured by Abel’s faithful sacrifice will now save His people from their sins, releasing them from the penalty AND the power of their sin.

In closing I would like us to meditate on a portion of Isaiah that is often called the 5th Gospel, beginning in chapter 52! As we close with the words of the Prophet I am reminded that in the classic movie Ben Hur they bring these words to cross from the lips of one of the wise men who had returned to see the Christ...

The writer of Hebrews tells us the Jesus endured the cross for the JOY set before Him and I believe that as Jesus faced the anger of the mobs, the false trials, the scourging and finally His own crucifixion He may have comforted Himself from a human standpoint with these passages as we should often be comforted in our lives...

Beginning at verse 7 of chapter 52:

“How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

- As we have often said, none of this was a surprise to God, but was all being carried out as part of His great plan of salvation

8 “Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, With their voices they shall sing together; For they shall see eye to eye When the Lord brings back Zion. 9 Break forth into joy, sing together, You waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.”

- Jesus came to save His people from their sins, to comfort His people, but it would come at a great cost

...13 “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. 14 Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; 15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.”

- The Jews and even the disciples expected a conquering Messiah who would come with power and strength...
- And such would certainly be the case, but not before Jesus came as the suffering Messiah who would solve the problem of sin!

1 “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. *[describe Jesus]*

3 “He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.”

- From a human standpoint, those who saw Jesus, beaten and exhausted, walking to Golgatha to be crucified would NOT have seen any hope or salvation...

5 “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”

- The innocent one has been condemned and now takes on Himself the penalty due our sin

6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”

This IS the Good News that we are to proclaim...

We serve the King who reigns at God's right hand & His Kingdom will fill the whole earth!

BUT we are commanded to gather around this Table until He comes again, proclaiming His death, because it was there that the innocent one paid the price for our sin and crushed the head of Satan as God had promised.

Again I must admonish us to live as though we believe this to be true!

Communion Meditation: I Peter 1:

"13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.