

Lent 2011 – People of the Passion

"Caiaphas, the Schemer"

Text: John 11:47-53

*What language shall I borrow To thank Thee, Dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, They pity without end?
Oh make me Thine forever! And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never, Outlive my love for Thee. (TLH 172)*

Dear Fellow Christians we enter this evening the sacred season of Lent – a time dedicated, on the one hand, to the special contemplation of our own sinfulness; and, on the other, to the contemplation of the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus. Obviously the two are intimately connected, for we acknowledge always that it was our sin that caused Jesus' suffering and death. To aid us in commemorating not only these truths but the very personal and human nature of our Lord's Passion, the theme for our meditations this Lenten season is "The People of the Passion." The text that will form the basis for our meditation this evening is found in John's Gospel, the 11th Chapter:

John 11:47-53 So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Trusting that our God will once again bless us through the study of these words, so we pray, "**Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Fellow Christians:

The fact that you are hearing or reading this sermon indicates a good thing. It is very likely an indication that you understand your own spiritual needs and acknowledge the value and benefit of Lent, and of the special gift that the season of Lent can be – is *intended* to be. As the pace of life

on earth continually escalates and becomes ever more chaotic and frenetic, Lent shines more and more as a unique and irreplaceable exercise where we are forced to slow down, to sit, and to contemplate. The more hectic life becomes, the more we learn to see Lent as a special, invaluable, God-given opportunity for comfort, growth, and strengthening – an oasis in a parched and arid spiritual wasteland.

While Christians seek to grow and mature in their view of and appreciation for the blessings offered to us in Lent, the world of course has adopted the exact opposite view. The world increasingly views religion as an annoyance and worship services as irritating disruptions. They tend to regard such gatherings – at best – as quaint throwbacks to a less enlightened era, and therefore as more or less a waste of time. There is, after all, so much to do and only so much time to get it all done...

In a word, society regards all of this religion stuff as just so much foolishness.

Don't miss the profound irony here. Jesus came to pay for the very sins also of those who now mock, belittle, and reject the very sacrifice he made. In fact sometimes we lose sight of a simple and yet profound truth: Lent (our Lord's passion) is not about things and places; it is about people – souls that will spend an eternity in heaven or hell. That's why Jesus left the perfection of heaven to suffer the sum total of the wrath that every single sinner had earned because of his or her sin.

It's nearly impossible to quantify such a thing – impossible to comprehend the enormity of the punishment Jesus suffered. Yet we begin this evening by trying. To do so, think back to just one sin in your past. Think of that which, in your mind, is the worst sin you can remember committing. Now ask yourself just what, humanly speaking, you would expect to have to suffer to make up for that sin. We understand, of course, that man cannot pay for past sins through his own suffering here in time, but just imagine what a human being would expect of you if you had wronged him in the way you have wronged God. Now take the punishment for that sin and multiply it by the infinite number of sins committed by human beings since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden. That's the bill the Jesus came to pay, and that's the level of suffering and misery visited upon him by divine justice there on the cross.

Jesus came for people, which is why we have opted to study *people* during this year's midweek services – specifically those individuals that

played a role in Jesus' passion. The first, as you have no doubt noted from the bulletin, is Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was the High Priest when Jesus was arrested. It was before Caiaphas that Jesus was tried. The words recorded in our text, however, were spoken some time prior to Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. His words, in fact, put into motion the events of Holy Week and of the death of the Son of God. In other words, had Caiaphas not persuaded the Jewish Ruling Council – the Sanhedrin – to seek Jesus' death, Judas would have had no market for his services as "Betrayer" and Pontius Pilate would never have been faced with the trial of an innocent man. Caiaphas was therefore at the very heart of the rot. His was the core evil that put all things into motion. His guilt cannot be over-estimated.

There were several factors that made Caiaphas' sin as black as it was. The first was his abuse of the power and position into which God had placed him. Scripture establishes a general rule that **"to whom much is given, much more will be required."** Caiaphas was given much, but with that favored position and power came tremendous responsibility. Given the fact that the Jews existed under Roman rule, there existed no greater Jewish power at this point in history than the position of high priest in Jerusalem. As high priest Caiaphas was both the spiritual and political leader of the Jews. That means that Caiaphas could have stopped the sham trial of Jesus with a word. With little more than the wave of his hand he could have silenced and dispersed the angry mob that called for the crucifixion of Jesus. This he didn't do precisely because it was what he wanted. He wanted Jesus dead – out of the way and forgotten by the people. Why? Because in his mind Jesus posed a threat to his earthly power and position.

What makes Caiaphas' actions all the more despicable was the fact that the office he held, the office of high priest, was in itself a type or foreshadowing of Jesus himself. Remember that the type is always inferior to the antitype (or the thing to which the type points or refers). That means that just as Jesus himself was far greater than the bronze serpent that Moses hung on a pole, so Jesus was also far superior to the office of the high priest and any man who held that office. The high priest was a type or picture of Christ in that he offered sacrifices for sins – for the people for his own. We are reminded in the Book of Hebrews how and why Jesus is greater: **Hebrews 7:26-28** For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests,

but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

What this means is that Caiaphas' entire office – his very existence – was established to point to (to be a picture of) the very man he plotted in our text to kill.

Why would he do such a thing? Because his focus had been shifted from heaven to earth; from the things of God to the things of man. The "logic" of what he said in our text only made sense to those who cared more for the pleasure of their bodies than for the salvation of their souls.

Consider for a moment the incredible evil of the words recorded in our text: ***"What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."*** Jesus himself repeatedly referred to the miracles or signs that he performed as God's divine proof that he was exactly who he said he was. *The Jews never seriously challenged the divine origin of Jesus' miracles!* Oh for a time they argued that they might be signs sent from the devil, but they themselves dismissed this nonsense when they said, in effect, *"Since when did Satan start doing good things for human beings?"* Again, I am unaware of any place in Scripture where the power to perform miracles is attributed to the devil. He can perform "trick" or "lying signs and wonders," but they are always just that – tricks or illusions. Never miracles. Remember how the Egyptian magicians mimicked a couple of the miracles performed by Moses, but then themselves acknowledged that what Moses was doing was miraculous, rather than trickery, and that it had its origin from God? We are reminded here of King Herod, who consulted the Scriptures to discover where Jesus was to be born, and then arrogantly and foolishly imagined that he could then kill the Savior that had been foretold by God himself.

Caiaphas himself spelled out his motivation – and it was as evil as it gets: ***"You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."*** In other words: *"Kill this man Jesus, and we'll get what we want."* Translation: *"I don't care who or what he is, we are going to do whatever it takes to preserve our power and position."* In this he is no different than the fool Herod.

Yet again, Lent is about people. And not just other people - Lent is about us. That means, in part, that it doesn't do us any good to throw

stones at a guy who has been dead for a couple thousand years. That just tends to make us arrogant and self-righteous. The problem, of course, is that there is a good bit of Caiaphas in each of us. We point out his problems only to reveal our own. You and I also tend to be more interested and active in our *temporary* well-being than our *spiritual* well-being. Worse than that, you and I also have that natural sinful tendency to want to silence the accuser rather than correct our behavior. You recall how John the Baptist was beheaded at the request of Herod's adulterous wife and step-daughter. Why? Because John had rightly condemned their adulterous marriage. Sinful mankind lashes out at the accuser, thinking it will end the accusation.

What about you? What's your natural, immediate reaction to even a well-deserved reprimand? Mostly it is to shout down, belittle, or vilify the accuser – as though that somehow justifies my sin. Have you ever looked ahead to what it would cost you to amend your sinful behavior, rather than to just follow God's Word and will, come what may? I'm not really entitled to this tax deduction, but if I can get away with it I'll shave a couple hundred dollars off my tax bill. I know we're not supposed to live together before we're married, but it will cost us a bunch of money if we do. If I cut this conversation short I won't get to hear that incredibly scandalous bit of gossip and I *really want to know*. It's up to you to identify your own examples of Caiaphas in your life.

The great news here, as always, is that Jesus did what he did to pay for exactly these – and all other – sins. How justified he would have been to declare each of us to be absolutely unworthy of so great a sacrifice on his part, but he didn't – such was his love to mankind. Such was and is his love for you and me. Lent is the time to bring such things to mind, to repent and to drive such sins from our hearts and lives. No one can force you to do such things. The power and will come from God, and they happen spontaneously and joyfully in the Christian whenever we put on that new man that longs to walk in perfect harmony with God's will. God help us so to walk by faith, and comfort us with the assurance of sins forgiven. Amen.

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Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2011

The Opening Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Congregation: *(Spoken) Amen.*

Confession and Absolution

P: *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God, in true repentance and humility we confess our sins to our Lord in the words of the 51st Psalm:*

Psalm 51 *(Supplement page 28)*

P: *Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. According to His authority, and by His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

All: *(Singing from p.19 of the Supplement) The Agnus Dei "Lamb of God"*

**O Lamb of God, O Christ our Lord, Whose blood, once shed,
true life restored, impart Your Joy, our faith increase.
Sustain with Your mercy and grant us Your peace.**

The Reading of the Passion History

The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy Christian Church
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Sermon Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

The Sermon – *The theme for our devotions this Lenten Season is*

"People of the Passion"

(Please turn to the back page for this evening's service details)

The Response – *(Hymn #383 Verses 1-2 "Seek Where Ye May")*

The Offering – *(TLH Hymn #366 v.6)*

**Naught have I, O Christ to offer,
Naught but Thee my highest Good.**

**Naught have I, O Lord to proffer
But Thy crimson-colored blood.**

Thy death on the cross hath Death wholly defeated

And thereby my righteousness fully completed;

Salvation's white raiments I there did obtain,

And in them in glory with Thee I shall reign.

The Prayer of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: Amen, Amen, Amen. *(Sung by all)*

The Closing Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Silent Prayer

Announcements

[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]

Weekly Hymn and Meditation Schedule

March 9

Hymns: 140, 158,
154

Lenten Theme:
**"People of the
Passion"**

*"Judas, the
Opportunist"*

Text: Luke 22:1-6,
John 12:4-6

Pastor James Naumann

March 16

Hymns: 325,
149, 159

Lenten Theme:
**"People of the
Passion"**

*"Caiaphas, the
Schemer"*

Text: John 11:47-53

Pastor Michael Roehl

March 23

Hymns: 155, 721
151 (1, 6-7)

Lenten Theme:
**"People of the
Passion"**

*"Nicodemus, the
Silent Believer"*

Text: John 3:1-2, 7:50-
51; 19:39

Pastor James Naumann

March 30

Hymns: 141, 172
(1,2 & 4), 156

Lenten Theme:
**"People of the
Passion"**

*"Peter, the Born
Leader"*

Text: Luke 22:31-32,
61-62; John 21:17

Pastor Michael Roehl

April 6

Hymns: 166, 421
171 (1, 3-7)

Lenten Theme:
**"People of the
Passion"**

*"Pontius Pilate, the
Thinker"*

Text: John 19:12

Pastor James Naumann

April 13

Hymns: 158, 377
(1, 7-9), 145

Lenten Theme:
**"People of the
Passion"**

*"One of the Mob,
the Follower"*

Text: Matthew 27:20-
23

Pastor Michael Roehl

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