

March 16, 2016
Luke 22:63-23:25

Midweek Lent 5
The Trial: A Place of God's Will

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.

We live in a world of trials. Turn on the television and, frequently, some major trial is underway. In the past we can think of OJ Simpson, Timothy McVeigh, the Unabomber, Kobe Bryant, Scott Peterson, Michael Jackson, Casey Anthony, Saddam Hussein, and others...you can almost chronicle the passage of time by watching these major cases and trials on TV. More interesting, however, is the way these cases are told. Have you ever noticed how on television a trial is turned into a drama? It really is not about the facts of the case at all. Instead, the reporters are more interested in the strategies of the lawyers, the emotions of the people, the intentions of the witnesses, the biases of the judge. Impartial observation. A clear statement of the facts. These things are strange in court reporting today. Instead, we find families of the victims sobbing out their story. This keeps us watching. It provides a sense of drama but it doesn't advance our understanding of the case. Today, drama brings ratings, and so we are taken from facts to feelings. Justice no longer sits blindfolded and impartial. Now she holds a TV camera in one hand and a list of ratings in the other.

Since this is the way we tend to see trials today, we would expect that Luke's account of the trial of Jesus would strike us as radically different. Luke begins his Gospel by saying that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning. He tells us he desired to write "an orderly account." We would expect Luke to present the trial of Jesus in a less dramatic, more reasoned fashion. After all, he didn't have a TV camera, was not concerned about ratings, and the courtroom drama had not become his hearer's standard fare. Surprisingly, however, Luke's account doesn't sound all that different. As Luke records the trial of Jesus, he spends a great amount of time telling us about the people, the emotions, and the behind-the-scenes movements surrounding the case.

Luke tells us about the relationship between the judges, Herod and Pilate. Enemies before, they became friends this day. Luke tells us what Herod wanted. What Pilate wanted. And, all the while, Luke never lets us forget about the anger of the chief priests and teachers of the law. Why does Luke spend so much time on this drama? Today, it occurs to keep people watching. For Luke, I think there is another reason.

Have you ever gone to look out a window, and suddenly you see a reflection of yourself? You go over to the kitchen window to check on the kids in the backyard and for a moment all you see is your own reflection. It's a work of the light. You see yourself, dressed and ready for work, whether it's in the field or in the office or for a dinner meeting, and yet you realize that you are not the parent you wanted to be. This is the third evening in a row that you are not home. There hasn't been a night at home with the kids all week. Now, as the babysitter arrives, or as you leave the kids and your wife, you are looking out the window to make sure they are all right and you realize...they are. They're okay, kicking the soccer ball around in the yard, oblivious to

what is going on inside. You, however, are the one who isn't all right. Looking out the window to check up on your children, you find yourself looking within, checking up on yourself. In a way, Luke's record of the trial works like that window. He causes us to see ourselves by a work of the light.

You read this trial expecting to look into the facts about Jesus, and, instead, Luke teaching you the facts of a fallen world. You read this trial expecting to establish the truth of Christ's claims, and instead, Luke asks you to confess the truth about yourself. Luke knows that the trial is not about establishing Jesus' innocence. That is firmly established. Pilate himself finds no reason to crucify this man. The matter in question is "Why is an innocent man condemned to die?" And to this, Luke gives an in the last sentence of this section: Pilate "*delivered Jesus over to their will.*" "Their will." That is the fact, the glimpse of the fallen world that Luke gives us. It is the will of a fallen world that its God should die. Luke invites us to look within the human heart this evening and confess the facts of a fallen world. It affects Jesus then, and it affects Him now.

Have you ever found yourself willing one thing in the church but doing another in the world? Have you ever wanted to tell of God's love to your neighbor but then talked about the weather instead? Although Jesus has rescued us from the sin that lies in us by nature, there are times when we find ourselves acting like we are still part of the fallen world. Jesus says, "*the spirit is willing but the body is weak.*" Luke's account of the trial this evening helps us to call sin *sin*. It shows us where such willfulness leads us, and it gently encourages us to confess our plight. It's easy in church to will the peace of God for all people; it's harder, however, to act on that when you have not been promoted for one reason or another. It's easy in church to want to help the poor, but it's hard to do that when you see an advertisement for the newer model of truck...besides, you work hard for the money you earn. And the more and more we go through this changing will, the easier it becomes to simply come into church and say one thing and then go out into the world and do another. And that my friends, is sin.

But this trial is not the end of the story. The trial of Jesus is about more than the changing will of humans; it is also about the eternal will of God. This evening, God enters a place filled with the battles of human wills and transforms it to be a place of His eternal will. At the very beginning of the story, Luke tells us what happened to Jesus at the hands of the men who were holding Him. They blindfolded and beat Him and cried out to Him "Prophecy." They mocked Jesus as a false prophet, and yet what they were doing fulfilled the prophecy of God. Jesus had predicted His Passion. He had even predicted this mocking. The death of Jesus is part of God's eternal will. God so desires to save all people that He sends His own Son to suffer in their place. This is the will of God: a love stronger than death; a word more powerful than sin; the death of Jesus that brings forgiveness to all people. Even here. Tonight. Every time we gather, Jesus comes and forgives us our sins and then sends us out, forgiven, into the world.

Our world is indeed a world of trials. The Aaron Knodel Trial. The John Tetting murder trial. The Tetting Case was a case where I sat on the Jury. These trials are made for TV almost. The greatest trial, however, is the trial of our Savior. It goes on all the time. It happened there in

Jerusalem and it happens today. Week after week, people make judgements against God. Sometimes it receives national attention as courtroom dramas debate the right of Christians to witness to their Savior. Other times it goes unnoticed. In the office, at the lunch table, in the field, during the first year of college. People repeatedly subject Jesus to a trial of consideration and deny Him to be their Lord. A great teacher. Perhaps. A revolutionary. A prophet. A figment of the Church's imagination. These are their verdicts. But God? NO! For the world around us, Jesus is not God, and HE certainly is not the only way of salvation.

Luke, however, teaches us to confess Jesus. TO confess His death and resurrection as the only way of salvation for all people. As Luke tells this story, we see the mission of God. Wherever people with a changing will fight against God, God comes among them, fighting for their salvation. Here in the courts of Jerusalem, there among the nations, here at Trinity Lutheran Church (St. Paul Lutheran Church) and there in Fisher (Euclid) are the people for whom God has offered His Son, our Savior. They are lost in the grip of an ever-changing will. Their actions might offend you. Their conversations might be rude. You may get tired of trying. Become angry at their world. They hold Jesus up on trial and declare Him to be foolishness. But God continues to seek them in His love. Week after week, even tonight, in this place, He works the wonder of His love. Certain of our Savior, certain of His salvation, we go now to a world that waits in need of its God, it's Savior.

In Jesus name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.