

Message for March 4, 2018

"The Courtroom and the Courtyard"

Mark 14:53-64

NIV

<sup>53</sup> They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. <sup>54</sup> Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

<sup>55</sup> The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. <sup>56</sup> Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

<sup>57</sup> Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: <sup>58</sup> "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'" <sup>59</sup> Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

<sup>60</sup> Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" <sup>61</sup> But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again, the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

<sup>62</sup> "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

<sup>63</sup> The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked.

<sup>64</sup> "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death.

1. Prayer
2. Before we start today, let us remember where Peter is in this story --- he, a loyal follower is outside of the courtroom, warming himself by the fire -while Jesus is in the courtroom-- we will pick up more about Peter towards the end of the discussion about the courtroom.
3. Tell the story of my being in the court in Upper Marlboro for a speeding violation!
  - a. The judge in a black robe high on the bench
  - b. I was guilty of speeding
  - c. 30 hours of community service
  - d. Done in Westminster.
4. In today's Bible reading, we find that Jesus appeared in court, but it wasn't the sort of experience that I had. There was no kind clerk, no impartial judge, no people testifying on his behalf. He had been dragged there after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, escorted by the Temple Guard, who marched him to the house of the High Priest in the Upper City of Jerusalem, and brought him before the Sanhedrin.
5. The Sanhedrin was the gathering of 71 Jewish rabbis, priests and elders who constituted the Supreme Court and the Senate of the Jewish people in Judea during the Roman period.
  - a. They were the ruling body of the Jewish people.

- b. The Sanhedrin would gather every day, except for Holy Days, in the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple, but this time they gathered not there, but at the house of the high priest.
  - c. They gathered in the wee hours of the morning, sometime after midnight.
- 6. It was unusual, perhaps even illegal, for them to be meeting at night. Imagine the Supreme Court doing the same thing: meeting in the middle of the night in a place they hadn't normally met and deciding to condemn someone to death.
  - a. We would call that a kangaroo court – where the outcome is always predetermined regardless of the evidence.
  - b. You and I would have found that unacceptable, but this is exactly what the Sanhedrin did so as to avoid the crowds who had been faithfully following Jesus.
- 7. Now the Sanhedrin, ie. the Supreme Court, was trying to find evidence to convict Jesus, but because they couldn't find two witnesses to agree, they couldn't convict Jesus.
  - a. I want you to notice that not only has this Sanhedrin gathered under the cover of night to hear a case, they were also actively seeking testimony against Jesus.
  - b. They weren't impartial judges but prosecutors and advocates for the prosecution.
  - c. Even so, they couldn't put together a legal case.
- 8. Near the end of the proceedings the Chief Priest asks a question. **He is now acting as both the leader of the court and the chief prosecutor.** He asks, "Are you the Messiah or not?" He asks this question because anyone proclaiming themselves to be the Messiah or Anointed One, would be proclaiming his superiority to Caesar, the Roman leader.
  - a. When Jesus answers that yes, he is the Messiah, Caiaphas shouts, "He has committed blasphemy! He is insulting God!" and Jesus is condemned to die.
- 9. The problem is that the Jewish law did not have a provision for putting to death someone who had committed blasphemy, so they needed the Roman authorities, they needed Pontius Pilate, in order to carry out their sentence.
- 10. **The question that has always bothered me is: Why did these pious, deeply religious people insist on putting Jesus to death?** What was he doing to them that made them so afraid? And the more I thought about it the more I realized that they were afraid of his power. Actually, they were fearful of Jesus and their fears drove them to irrational thinking – which can happen to us also.
- 11. **First** -- Jesus had the power to influence large numbers of people, people who generally felt powerless, and he cared for them in a way that empowered them to stick up for themselves.

- a. The people were empowered to follow religious teachings that served God not humans.
- b. The people followed a man **who sometimes broke the rules** if there was a compelling reason to do it, Jesus, who said, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath."
- c. Jesus could influence people with his powerful speeches and the religious leaders found that intimidating.
- d. The Pharisees were afraid of his power. – just like many leaders are if they see their power base slowly eroding away.

12. **Second**, I think they were also fearful of his charisma. Jesus had the power to hold large crowds under his sway for hours.

- a. He could perform miracle after miracle without breaking a sweat.
- b. People sought him for advice about matters of law and culture, even though he didn't have any religious authority, any formal training that qualified him to give such advice.
- c. Jesus was a renegade, who was coloring outside the lines and the religious leaders thought 'who died and made you king?'

13. Here was a man who had risen through the ranks, not through schooling and the usual channels, but simply because of who he was.

- a. The religious rulers were jealous of his charisma and fearful, a little like the way some pastors of ordinary sized churches are jealous of pastors of larger churches.

14. **Third**, I think they also chafed at Jesus' new ideas.

- a. He was always talking about the Kingdom of God as if he had a corner on the market.
- b. He was talking about the destruction of the Temple and it being rebuilt in three days. He was saying the law says this, but I say that.
- c. All of this talk of change was new and upsetting to the establishment, but the common people seemed to be eating it up as it was eating away at the authority and leadership of those who were in charge.

15. **Fourth**, there was an economic impact of Jesus' actions in the Temple. Remember that Jesus was very angry about the money changers and the people who sold goats and sheep for sacrifice at the Temple. It was Passover time and the Chief Priest who ran the Temple would be concerned that the collection of the Temple tax that was required under Jewish law along with the sales of the sacrificial animals. Jesus was angry and keep saying that the Temple was a place for prayer and not money exchangers.

a. **Explain about the Temple tax and the money changers.**

16. And so they condemned him to die. People do this to people, when anger and fear conspire to suppress love and goodness.

17. All of this is even more baffling when we realize that there were at least two and more likely 15 or 20 of the people on the Sanhedrin that held no animosity towards Jesus, that thought he was doing good and who, if not supported him, at least didn't wish him ill.

a. Nicodemus was on the Sanhedrin. He was one who had approached Jesus early in his ministry and asked Jesus some questions about being born again.

b. And Joseph of Arimathea, we learn after Jesus was crucified, was one who actually disagreed with the Sanhedrin in their plan and action. He is the one who provided the burial tomb for Jesus' body.

18. **Why didn't they speak up during the trial?**

a. Were they also afraid of the Sanhedrin and what they would do to them?

b. Perhaps they were afraid of being counted as one of Jesus' disciples. Even though they knew that what they were doing was wrong, they didn't want to speak out against the majority.

19. **Does that ever happen to you? Are you afraid of being seen as one of Christ's disciples when you are in a hostile crowd? How do you – or do you share your faith?**

20. Think about this example: Dave and Samantha had a couple of friends over for dinner. Dave wanted to say 'thank you' to them for all the support they had given him during his unemployment. Chuck is a former co-worker of Dave's and Chuck has taken Dave out to lunch on several occasions, has given him advice, and has just generally been a great guy who keeps saying with his words and his actions, *"You're a good guy, Dave. There's no good reason that someone won't snatch you up quickly. You have so many skills and talents. You will find a job."*

21. Chuck and Carol are non-religious. They don't go to church, never took their two kids to church, never saw a need for church. In fact, Chuck is the person that Samantha remember talking to him on the phone and asking why he doesn't go to church and he said, "You want me to be honest?" Samantha said, "Yes." He said, "It's boring."

22. Anyway, we had them over to dinner and before the meal Samantha asked if we could bow to say grace. We all bowed our heads and Samantha gave a prayer of thanks for them, for the meal that Dave had prepared, and asked for a blessing on our conversation that it may build

up and encourage one another. Samantha wasn't apologetic about praying and they were gracious, knowing that prayer and a life of faith is important to them.

23. That's one little thing, praying with the consent of someone you know who isn't Christian.
- We need to be able to stand up for our faith and values in places where those values and that faith may not be appreciated.
  - We need to stand up for justice where others are being put down.
  - We need to advocate for freedom when others are being bound by unjust laws.
  - Especially in this toxic political climate we need to stand up for what is right and just. But we have to understand that not everyone will agree with us. But we are to love them and appreciate them. Especially while we speak.
24. Consider Rosa Parks – whose body rested in the Rotunda of the US Capitol in 2005--- Billy Graham's was just a few days ago.
- On the afternoon of December 1, 1955, 42 year old African-American Rosa Parks, returning home from her job as an assistant tailor at a Montgomery, Alabama, department store, boarded bus 2857 on the Cleveland Avenue line.
  - When told to give up her seat for a white man, she refused and was arrested for violating the city's racial segregation laws.
  - Her act of civil disobedience precipitated the 13-month Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was led by Martin Luther King, Jr. Though not the first African American woman to be arrested for refusing to yield her seat on a Montgomery bus, it was her arrest that spurred the bus boycott that eventually succeeded in ending the segregated seating on Montgomery buses.
25. **Are you willing to say, "listen, this is wrong," when confronted with injustice? Are you willing to try and stop the school yard fight or stand up for the co-worker who's always getting put down? Or do you blend in with the crowd?**
26. **Fear is what shaped the response of the Sanhedrin. Jesus had to die because they were afraid.**
27. The scripture in 1John 14, says perfect love casts out fear. Are we prepared to banish our fears and live in love?
28. As we move from the courtroom back to the courtyard, we see Peter. Peter, who had crept into the courtyard, who so wanted to fulfill his promise to never leave Jesus that he had come as close as he dared to the place where Jesus was. He was in the courtyard with the men who had dragged Jesus there, trying to keep his distance yet yearning to be close to Jesus.

**29. Are we yearning to be close to Jesus without knowing how? Do we find ourselves like Peter pretending that we are not his disciples? Do we cover it up, not mention it and avoid such topics so as to keep safe in our silence?**

30. Whether in the courtyard or the courtroom, our silence serves no one.

- a. We need to speak what we believe, to stand up for those who are being tried or bullied or oppressed.**
- b. We need to speak of our faith without fear while loving and respecting those with whom we disagree.**

31. Every one of us is a combination of courage and cowardice.

- a. Every one of us is going to fall short of what God wants us to do. But we gain courage from the fact that even Peter didn't let his cowardice stop him.
- b. Even though he denied knowing Jesus, Peter went on to be a great leader of the church, one who knew failure, repented and was forgiven. If there is grace for Peter, there is grace for us.

32. When the woman asks Peter if he is Jesus' disciple, he denies it three times, just as Jesus said he would. Peter winds up saying, "I don't know the man." It's the first time he told the truth. He didn't really know him and what he was up to. The rooster crows in the background and Peter breaks down and weeps.

33. It's remarkable that this story is in the Bible at all. And it's one of the few stories that is in all four gospels.

- a. Everyone would have known that Peter was the first leader of the church after Jesus.
- b. Leaders rarely admit their failures. The blame is shifted to others.
- c. But Peter did. He was the one who had to have relayed this epic failure. Why would he do this? Why not keep it silent?

**34. Because Peter knew that through Jesus in the end there is forgiveness even for our most willful and epic failures.**

- a. Peter is the model for redemption. It's because of him the faith has always held that you don't get to hold people's faults against them forever.
- b. Some people like to say that people don't ever really change, "a leopard cannot change his spots."

35. Well, thank goodness God created us to be human beings instead of leopards because sometimes, dear friends, people can and do change. Peter was one of them. I'm one of them. Maybe you can be one of them, too.

36. Thanks be to God