



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



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Sermon Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Luke 22: 66 - 23:25

Text for the Sermon:

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me,⁶⁸ and if I asked you, you would not answer.⁶⁹ But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."⁷⁰ They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You are right in saying I am."

Seeing is all about believing. But what if you see and you still do not believe?

I think this exactly what happened with Jesus in all his court appearances.

In our reading tonight Jesus appears in three courts, a religious one, a national public one and even in an international one!

In the first court appearance before the religious leaders He is accused of misusing the name of God and breaking the second and third commandments. By at least waiting till morning for an official hearing (as opposed to any informal interrogations that may have taken place earlier), the representatives of the Jewish religious leadership maintained some appearance of legality in the proceedings; night trials were illegal. "Leading priests," "elders" and "scribes" were the three groups represented on the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious court of Israel. The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish ruling body in Israel and was granted control by Rome over virtually all internal Jewish matters. It contained seventy members and a president, who was the high priest. The Sanhedrin membership consisted primarily of two groups: (1) the Sadducees, who were the leading priestly families and lay aristocrats, and the Pharisees, who were teachers of the law and (2) middle-class laity, made up the "elders" mentioned in 20:1. The full Sanhedrin, normally assembled in a meeting hall in the temple called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where they sat in a semicircle with the high priest in the center. Although they found Jesus guilty, they did not have the power to condemn Jesus to death. So they took him to the highest power in the land namely to the international court where Pilate as the Roman governor was the judge. Only he could deliver the death sentence. Although the seat of the Roman government was located in Caesarea, Pilate was in Jerusalem during the Passover festivities. This was wise policy because Passover was a time of heightened

nationalistic hopes and memories. If trouble were to arise, the odds were that it would take place during the Passover and in Jerusalem.

At the second court appearance which was only brief they accused Jesus of being a revolutionary, as someone, who is opposing the taxes to the Roman emperor and someone who declared himself as the king of the Jews! They changed the charges from religious to political ones. But Pilate was clever. When he heard that Jesus was a Galilean he sent him to the so-called king of the Jews namely Herod Antipas.

Jesus then appeared in the national court with Herod Antipas as the judge. He was a lighthearted and vain prince, and was chargeable with many infamous crimes. He beheaded John the Baptist at the instigation of Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod-Philip, whom he had married. The account of Jesus' appearance before Herod Antipas appears only in the Gospel of Luke. It is mentioned only here and in Acts 4:27–28. Herod probably resided in the Hasmonean palace, which lay just west of the temple. But Herod was not interested in the accusations of Jesus. He just wanted to have some fun and made a mockery of Jesus' so-called kingship. Luke portray the story in such a way that we can only come to one conclusion namely that Herod did not feel threatened by the accusation of the Sanhedrin of Jesus pretending to be the king of the Jews. So he sent Jesus back to Pilate with no verdict.

Pilate was now even surer of Jesus' innocence! And as Luke confirms Pilate and Herod even became friends. Most probably because they agreed for once with one another! Although Pilate wanted to let Jesus go, only with a punishment of whipping him, the accusers still were not satisfied. But they keep insisting that Jesus is guilty of deserving the death penalty. Pilate continued to seek Jesus' release. This time he sought to do so by allowing the people to choose, according to the custom, which "criminal" they wanted released. Pilate assumed the choice would be clear-cut. The people would certainly prefer to have Jesus of Nazareth released instead of the murderer Barabbas. To Pilate's dismay the Jewish leadership and the people cried instead for the release of Barabbas. For the third time Pilate pronounced Jesus innocent and sought to release him, but the cries for Jesus' crucifixion continued. Finally he released Barabbas to the people and handed Jesus over to their will.

"So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted." In 2 Macc 4:47 and 3 Macc 4:2 the term "gave sentence" is a technical term for giving a judicial sentence. Pilate did not declare Jesus guilty. He declared only that what Jesus' opponents desired should be granted.

Can you believe this injustice?

If there is one thing very clear from all Jesus' court appearances that He is the innocent! He was indeed innocent of all the charges and wrongly put to death. Furthermore he was declared innocent by the leading Roman authority Pilate and the puppet king of the Jews, Herod Antipas. He was put to death because of the pressures of the Jewish religious leadership.

Can you imagine the news headlines if this was true of our day: The church condemns Jesus to death! Can you imagine the news coverage of this injustice? Can

you imagine the ripple effect this would have on our society of the religious leaders condemning someone to death?

But this is not uncommon even to our day. Injustice is everywhere even in our own society. Just as Jesus was falsely accused and condemned to death, we also too frequently falsely accuse one another and yes even condemn each other to death. Sometimes death is actually a much milder version of the judgments that we arrive at.

And yes we even “murder” our God and saviour at times by:

- neglecting him,
- ignoring to acknowledge him as the only One and TRUE God,
- our idleness of not living our faith in him openly and publicly,
- not listening to His voice,
- by playing “god” to other people,
- our refusal to speak out or testify about our faith in God;
- our worshipping of the idols of this world,
- not telling or teaching all our children about God,
- by allowing injustices to occur in our societies and world,
- by our refusal to act as his followers in our societies and world,
- by our lack of discipline to stand up to the message and authority of His word.

I can go on with the list till Christmas!

Someone actually described the murder scene in a very descriptive way. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said at the end of the 19th century that God is dead and that we as his followers have murdered him! He actually describes the scene as one where the madman runs through the marketplace shouting: Where is God? And the reply: God is dead and we are his murderers!

So what is the message?

Well we can pull up our wee shoulders and say:
It was not me who did it, it was the religious leaders of Jesus’ day who condemned him, shame on them?

But in the end I guess we are all part of his condemnation because He died to take away our sins. He stood in three courts where you and I were supposed to be standing. He faced death, shame and condemnation on our behalf!

So we have to be at least thankful to God, even if we go through a bad patch in our faith. We have to show our commitment to him. If we do not want to be guilty of the murder against God we have to make sure when we are in the marketplaces of this world to show with our lives of faith that God is alive and still in charge. We have to show through our actions that God is love by loving others and stopping the injustices around us. We have to show our loyalty by serving Him as the Bible directs us to do.

Because if we don’t, the world might think God is dead! And accuse us as his murderers!

May we start tonight to live openly the existence of God in everything we do!

Amen

Prayer

Eternal God,
Who, in your Son, Jesus Christ,
Came to feed our hearts and to bring the dead to life;
Feed our hearts and lives this day,
So that where we are empty,
You will fill us with life again,
That we may bear the fruits of the Spirit
For the feeding of the world.

Amen