

**Weekend of Sunday, February 25, 2018**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**Primary Text: Mark 14:66-72, 15:1-15**  
**Sermon Title: “*Denied by Peter ~ Judged by Pilate*”**

## Theme

## Text

<sup>66</sup>While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. <sup>67</sup>When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." <sup>68</sup>But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. <sup>69</sup>And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." <sup>70</sup>But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." <sup>71</sup>But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." <sup>72</sup>At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

<sup>1</sup>As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. <sup>2</sup>Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." <sup>3</sup>Then the chief priests accused him of many things. <sup>4</sup>Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." <sup>5</sup>But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

<sup>6</sup>Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. <sup>7</sup>Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. <sup>8</sup>So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. <sup>9</sup>Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" <sup>10</sup>For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. <sup>11</sup>But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. <sup>12</sup>Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" <sup>13</sup>They shouted back, "Crucify him!" <sup>14</sup>Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" <sup>15</sup>So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

## **Sermon**

If you were with us last weekend then you know we are going on a spiritual journey with Jesus this Lent. It's not a long journey. Probably less than a few miles but it will take us six weeks to arrive at our destination.

We are journeying with Jesus along the Scriptural Stations of the Cross that begin in the Garden of Gethsemane on the infamous night of his betrayal, and it will end on Good Friday when his broken and lifeless body is hastily laid to rest in a borrowed tomb.

Traditionally, the Stations of the Cross in its several forms, are supposed to be a meditative spiritual exercise, so if you would like to and it would be helpful to you, I invite you to relax and close your eyes and allow the narrative and my commentary to play out in the theater of your mind. However, if you are one of those people who close your eyes and then fall asleep, you might want to focus your attention on the picture on the screen.

## **Interlude**

When we gathered last Sunday we witnessed the first three Scriptural Stations of the Cross.

The Scriptural Stations of the Cross begin with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed not once, but three times for his Heavenly Father to come up with another way to save his beloved creation. But Jesus' petitions were met with stone silence.

Then Judas, one of his own disciples, led an armed band of rabble made up of the spiritual and religious leaders of his people and betrayed him with a kiss! Yea, I know! A kiss.

They bound him and took him by force to the palace of the Chief Priest where he was put on trial in front of the Sanhedrin.

When the sermon was over, intentionally, awkwardly, Jesus was bound, led away, to be handed over to Pilate.

## Station Four ~ Jesus is denied by Peter (Mark 14:66-72)

Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, one of Jesus' inner circle, one who just hours before had stated confidently that he would always be there to support and defend his Lord, was one with all the rest in his desertion. But after Jesus was led away he had remorse and so he went to the courtyard of the high priest where Jesus was being held.

“What could I have done against the Temple guard?” he kept asking himself. “They were many and well-armed. We were a few and had little to protect ourselves. What could we have done?” he muttered to himself over and over again.

One of the servant girls of the high priest came by and thought she recognized him. “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth. You are one of them, aren't you?” But he denied it and continued to warm himself by the fire.

A cock crowed in the still cold air of the night.

He tried to walk away from her, but following him, she made another accusation, “This man is one of them.” But he denied it all the more and this time with disdain, “I don't know what you are talking about.”

Too many people had heard the questioning girl. Others began to look at him with suspicion. Another bystander said, “Yes, Yes, I think I saw you with him. You are one of his disciples, aren't you?” But Peter began to curse, and he swore an oath, “As God almighty is my witness, I do not know this man you are talking about.”

Mark wrote, <sup>72</sup>At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

Maybe it's at this point of the story that you begin to get emotional too. Why is that? Is it because as we reflect on our lives –

- our *worship when it's convenient*;
- our *I'll volunteer in ministry when I have time*;
- our *self-righteous, “Haven't I done enough already?”*

these attitudes are what come to the forefront of our minds?

Is it because when we see the fallibility of Peter, we see ourselves?

I'm not going to say it's OK, God revealed in Jesus Christ forgives us.

Listen carefully, it's not OK, but God revealed in Jesus Christ forgives us *anyway*.

### **Station Five ~ Jesus is judged by Pilate (Mark 15:1-15)**

In our society, in our country, we like to think that the justice system works. Oh sure we can all point to a case or two where the guilty party got off or the innocent person got stuck holding the bag, but generally, our system works.

Just to be clear, the crowd of rabble that arrested him and turned him over to the occupation authority, the spiritual and religious leaders of his own people, the priests and scribes and elders of the Jewish Temple, couldn't soil their hands with the dirty business of taking another person's life, but that didn't mean they couldn't get it done.

They took him Pilate. Pilate was a prefect, a military leader chosen to govern the province of Judea. This was not his calling. He likely would have been more comfortable on the battlefield than the palace, but for whatever reason, he was ordered to govern Judea and its capital Jerusalem.

Pilate was not a Jew, but as long as his subjects the Jews behaved themselves everyone got along just fine. Pilate was known both as a harsh man at times, and at other times known to give in to the Jewish leaders just to keep the peace.

This "Jesus problem" seemed to be a religious problem, not one he wanted to deal with. You can hear that in the dialogue.

Pilate's first question was, "Are you the King of the Jews?" This was a rhetorical question. If there was an uprising in the making Pilate would have known about it. Jesus answered but, it was really no answer at all.

Then chaos broke out. The chief priests began rapid fire accusations. Pilate was not amused. “Quiet!” he yelled. “Jesus, do you hear the charges they bring against you? Don’t you have anything to say in your defense?”

Silence was his only response.

I mentioned last week that his silence is one of the things about the Passion that bother me the most. It is just not human not to defend not ourselves. Back me into a corner; accuse me of something I didn’t do and I will fight back. To not defend myself is not what I would have done. It’s not what any of us would have done.

Now don’t be confused, Pilate didn’t really care one way or another about this case. But frankly, it annoyed him that these clerics wanted him to do their dirty work.

It had been the tradition that during the Passover he would release one prisoner for them. So he selected one that was just despicable, one that was a murderer and an insurrectionist. If the Jews just wanted to maintain the status quo with their Roman overlords, then there really was no decision, he thought. They will free Jesus, after all, he has done nothing warranting death.

So he went to the crowd and extended them the offer. Mark wrote it this way:

“Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”<sup>10</sup> For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over.

But the Chief priests were working the crowd against him, “Release Barabbas! Release Barabbas!”

Confused by their response he asked, “Then what do you want me to do with this man YOU call the King of the Jews?” “Crucify him!” They shouted, “Crucify him!” “Why, what evil has he done?” he asked. But they shouted all the more. “Crucify him.”

There was no satisfying the bloodthirst of the crowd and so “to satisfy the crowd” Mark wrote, he released Barabbas, had Jesus flogged, and then handed him over to be crucified.

Matthew added to his version of the story that as a symbol of his aversion to what was going on, Pilate called for water and a basin and symbolically washed his hands of the situation.

Pilate just wanted peace during the Passover, a time when the city was already swelled up to many times its normal size with pilgrims from all over the known world. Tensions were always a little higher in these times. If a riot was to erupt, Rome would surely hear about it.

But no amount of water can wash away the stain of sin. Not for Pilate; not for the Jews; not for you and me. And here, you see, we have a problem. We may not have been there to add our voices to the chorus calling for his death, but by virtue of our sinfulness, we are the cause of his death.

Since Adam all have been mired in sin. For hundreds of years, the Jews came to Jerusalem to make sacrifice for their sins. But in the psalms God himself said he takes no delight in our sacrifices. Nothing human beings can do can wash away the guilt of our sin. And so God had to step in and save us again. As the old chorus goes,

What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Paul would later write about this;

Philippians' 2:8 <sup>he</sup> humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death —  
even death on a cross.

Why would he do this? Because, as I tell the children every week, *God loves us so much he couldn't bear to go through eternity without us.* I go on with them to say, *so God sent us Jesus to show us how to live a godly life.* And while that is true, there is more to the story. Sin remains our insurmountable problem. And so God sent Jesus, the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world – past, present, and future.