“What Have You Done?”

John 18:33-37

Early Friday morning, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples. He is easily found to be arrested.

John 18:12-14 . . . [12]So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. [13]First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in- law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. [14]Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Jesus is given two different trials on Friday morning. He stands before both Jewish and Roman judges. John’s gospel is the only one to mention that Jesus appears before Annas. Why does he go before Annas when it’s his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who actually holds the position of high priest? Some scholars believe that because the appointment for high priest was for life, Annas may have been seen as the real high priest or the one with more experience, age, and authority.

John 18:19-24 . . . [19]Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. [20]Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. [21]Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." [22]When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" [23]Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" [24]Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Jesus is questioned in an informal manner. Jewish law requires witnesses to be present in a formal trial, but since none are mentioned, the questioning is probably not official. The turn of events suggest the case should have been dismissed, but instead a series of events lead to Jesus' execution.

When the high priest questions Jesus about his disciples and teaching, he responds that he has taught openly and kept nothing a secret. When one of the police hears Jesus not directly answering the high priest's question, he strikes Jesus on the face. And so it begins.

Before Jesus could stand before a Roman court, the charges against him had to be made by the official Jewish priest – Caiaphas.

Only then is Jesus taken into the headquarters of the Romans to stand trail before Pilate.

John 18:28-32 . . . [28]Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. [29]So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" [30]They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." [31]Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." [32](This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

The Jews refused to walk into the Praetorium where Jesus stood trial before Pilate because to walk into the house of any gentile, any non-Jew, would make them unclean and unable to celebrate the Passover. But the hypocritical Jewish leaders were more than willing to send Jesus in to be condemned during the Passover.

In our gospel text for “Christ the King” Sunday, Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

John’s Gospel repeatedly uses the word “King” to describe Jesus. In fact, when Jesus calls his first disciples, Nathanael makes the initial declaration that Jesus is not only the Son of God, but the king of Israel.

John 1:49 . . . [49]Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

In the sixth chapter of John, when Jesus perceives the people are going to come and take him by force in order to instate him as king, he retreats to a quiet mountainside. When Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, he is greeted with the title “King of Israel”.

“Are you the king of the Jews?” Pilate asks Jesus.

John 18:34-35 . . . [34]Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" [35]Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

“What have you done?” There was a parishioner who sought to guilt me for not recognizing everything he had done in the church with a text message list of his accomplishments. At the end of the long list, being a Lutheran, he confessed that none of these accomplishments would earn him salvation, but some recognition would be nice.

“What you done?” Jesus could have described a long list of accomplishments. Feeding the 5,000 with a few loaves and fish. Healing the blind man, the deaf man, the woman with the flow of blood, the lepers, and the list goes on and on.

Teaching thousands in the fields and in the synagogues. Making water into wine, walking on water, and healing with spit. Jesus could have gone on and on.

"What have you done?" If you were asked that question, how would you reply?

When I'm visiting with an elderly person who may not have much time left with us in this life as I visited with Bob Goff preparing to celebrate his 101st birthday last Sunday, sometimes I'll ask questions, encouraging the person to share their story. Or when I'm visiting with a family preparing for a loved one's funeral, I'll encourage them to reminisce, to share stories as they give thanks for good memories.

"What have you done?" People share stories about their parents and grandparents, about their brothers and sisters, about their children and grandchildren. People tell stories about growing up in the church, about Sunday School and confirmation teachers, about Pastor Don chasing them off the front lawn when they were playing football or down from the tower when they were caught climbing it. People tell stories about the people they worked with in their jobs and in the church. People tell stories about relationships with people they loved and didn't love. People love to tell the story about how they met their spouse and the birth of their children.

These are the most meaningful stories about our relationships with one another, not about how much money we made, how big our house was, the car we drove, or how much we accomplished. In the end, we remember and give thanks for who we loved and who loved us.

"What have you done?"

John 18:36 . . . [36]Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

In this world, people fight to keep their leader in power. Jesus' followers would have fought to keep him from being arrested. But Jesus would not allow them to fight because as Jesus says three times in verse 36, his "kingdom is not from this world".

Jesus' kingdom is the fulfillment of this world. Jesus' kingdom is this world recreated sinless and perfect and eternal. Jesus' kingdom is loving one another perfectly and forever. Jesus' kingdom is the wedding feast without end. Jesus' kingdom is the eternal feeling of giving a hug and a kiss to your grandchildren when you haven't seen them for a long time. Jesus' kingdom is worship and singing with Jesus at the altar smiling and welcoming every person of faith. Jesus' kingdom is definitely "not from this world". Praise God!

On Saturday, September 15th, we celebrated two weddings in this sanctuary. At 11:00 in the morning, a young couple, Pavlo and Audrey and at 4:30, a middle-aged couple trying it again, Frank and Diana.

When we're standing together at the altar, facing one another, holding hands, with simultaneous smiles and tears, no matter how old we are, we're promising to love one another with Jesus' kingdom love. But the only way that it even works is if we learn to forgive one another along the way with Jesus' kingdom forgiveness.

If Jesus chooses not to go to the cross, there would be no forgiveness and no resurrection. If we choose not to follow Jesus to the cross and not live lives of self-sacrifice for the needs of our loved ones, then there is no forgiveness and no resurrection. We are only and always saved by God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ.

A wedding celebration is a foretaste of the feast to come. A marriage relationship, whether it ends up being good or bad, teaches us about the self-sacrificial love and forgiveness of Christ. As followers of Christ, as forgiven sinners, as lovers of one another, we follow Jesus to the cross and to Easter morning, knowing as he knew that his kingdom was not of this world.

In the meantime we serve, we forgive, we love, we hope, we screw up, and we live together. We live, knowing the truth.

John 18:37 . . . [37]Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

May the truth of God . . .

#431 – O Christ, What Can It Mean For Us