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Mark 14:53-65
VIA DOLOROSA: FAKE NEWS

As we make our way through Lent, we have been following with the journey that Jesus made on his way to the cross.

Last week, Kirby led us on the journey with Jesus and the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane and his arrest. Today we focus on the trial of Jesus.

Let's look at some of the background information helpful in following along with the details of this biblical account.

We are told that "the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death..."

First, who were the Sanhedrin? They were a council made up of 71 of the wisest and most religious men of the time. In Jesus' day, the Sanhedrin ruled over all things religious just like the Romans ruled over their political lives. The Sanhedrin had control of the Temple and the religious courts, and they had seen the crowds flocking to Jesus. They had seen Jesus heal the sick and command unclean spirits out of people. Jesus was a threat to their power, and so they search for a way to have him put to death.

A trial might seem like a good idea, but they had to bend the rules from the very beginning:

- Trials were not to be held at night, as this one was.
- A trial had to be held in the court room – not in the High Priest's home, as this one was.
- Witnesses had to agree. In verse 56, we read, "For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree."
- And finally, the high priest is to be the impartial judge.

They are going to have to let Jesus go if they do not come up with some sort of charge. So, the high priest stands up and begins to question Jesus himself. In our day, this would be like the judge asking condemning questions. Caiaphas, the high priest, asks, "Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" His wording was brilliant. He was asking if Jesus was claiming to be **the Messiah who was God**. If Jesus answered yes, then He could be convicted of the capital crime of blasphemy.

Jesus was not going to deny who He was and the mission He had to accomplish. He says, "I am and all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." Jesus not only answered Caiaphas, but went a whole lot further in His declaration.

In this reply to the members of the Sanhedrin, Jesus uses three titles (two of them for the very first time) which communicate something of who he is.

First, Jesus says, yes, I am the Christ, the Messiah

He claims he is the Anointed One, the one chosen by God and appointed to bring the good news of God's new Kingdom into the world. This is the title of Jesus that is most often used in the New Testament. Given by people who knew and met him. It is a title that offers hope for humanity. The Messiah is one who comes to deliver, to liberate, and to redeem.

Second, Jesus says, yes, I am the Son of God

The title of **Son of God** claims a unique closeness between Jesus and God. It gives him the role of mediating between humanity and their Creator – the **current** job of the priests.

And third, Jesus says, yes, I am the Son of Man

This title, familiar to the listeners from the Old Testament scriptures, would refer to a heavenly being, a transcendent figure who will eventually come to earth in triumph and act as judge of all humanity. This is the ultimate Messianic Savior.

Jesus takes upon himself titles given him by men, by God and by himself to declare that his is a mission of hope, salvation and judgement.

He is the Messiah sent from God, who is God in the flesh. God's Good News. No fake news here!

Caiaphas tore his robes. Jesus has **blasphemed** the name of God.

Forget the false witnesses and the lack of charges against Jesus. They will charge Jesus on the basis of His words. Jesus is condemned to death.

Where does this leave us – as 21st century Christians? Hopefully **uncomfortable!** Let me explain.

This week, I took part in 3 Bible studies here at the church – Tuesday morning, Wednesday morning and Wednesday afternoon. (Yes, you can join us at any of those times for Bible Study here!) As we struggled to understand this passage and its call to us today in each of these gatherings, it became clear to me that this passage, and indeed the ministry and death of Christ, call us to be uncomfortable. Uncomfortable with the ways we don't follow the examples given to us in Christ's life. Uncomfortable with the disciples and our denial of Christ and his claim as Lord. And uncomfortable with the horrific and demeaning way Jesus is condemned to death.

As a believer and a follower of Christ, we are offered forgiveness and Good News here at this table. And what have we done? Nothing deserving of such grace.

Nothing even close. But we are called to continue to change and grow closer to Christ. And that is part of the journey to the cross – and to the table.

As a preacher, I work hard to study the text and share its message for us here and now in a way that is honest and meaningful. You listen to my words, but your focus should always be on the cross – right here in the center of our worship. For that is the center of our worship. I am going to do something to help you be focused on the cross ... **(move to back of the sanctuary ... mic on ...)**. Your focus should not be on the preacher, or the organist, or the choir ... our sight, our hearts, our efforts should point to the cross.

But that journey doesn't end there. It is an empty cross – for Jesus has claimed who he is, given his life and has risen in glory. And that journey leads us to the table – where we are forgiven, and loved and called to serve one another.

I want you to continue to focus on the cross and table ...

Nadia Bolz Weber shares a story in her book, Accidental Saints, about meeting a fellow pastor whose wife was fighting cancer. After the wife's death, Nadia writes this: "I had inadvertently become one of his pastors during the time of his wife's death ... it was an honor, but if I was totally honest, I also felt some kind of weird pride about it... We call this kind of thing "serving others" as though it's an entirely selfless thing, but to tell the truth, I've never known how to keep from feeling self-important when I help people. Being the one to serve is a position of power... even as we are 'being Christ' to someone else... We as a people of God are certainly called to feed the hungry and cloth the naked... But seeing myself or my church or my denomination as "the blessing" – like so many mission trips to help "those less fortunate than ourselves" – can easily descend into a blend of benevolence and paternalism... If Jesus said, "I was hungry and you fed me," then Christ's presence is not embodied in those who feed the hungry (as important as that work is), but Christ's presence is in the hungry being fed... Christ comes to us in the **needs** of the poor and hungry, needs that are met by another so that the gleaming redemption of God might be known."

That is the call of the cross – seeing **Christ in the needs** of others. May our journey this Lenten season keep us focused on the cross and its Good News and powerful presence in our lives and others to redeem us and offer us hope. May this very **Good News** never become **fake news** to us or others. Amen.