



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Midweek Lenten Worship
Sermon Text: [John 11:47-53](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

Caiaphas, the Schemer

Our society seems to love to rank things, doesn't it? Even before a college football team or a college basketball team is playing a game, they come out with the rankings of the top 25 teams. How many of you here who might have watched the academy awards couldn't wait to get the list of best and worst dressed and tear it apart and look at it? Not only do we like to rank the best things, we also like to rank the worst things, don't we? That's kind of how we are.

So I suppose someplace, sometime along the line in your mind during some Lenten season as you listened to sermons or the readings and thought about some of the different people involved in the suffering or the passion of Christ you thought to yourself, who is the worst?

It's probably a mute point though, isn't it? Because if you and I weren't sinners, Jesus never would have left heaven and Judas maybe wouldn't have betrayed him. Pilate wouldn't have put him to death even though he knew he was innocent. I suppose your answer should be that you're the chief sinner, the worst person involved in Jesus' passion, and my answer should be that I'm the worst person involved in Jesus' passion. That would probably be honest.

But I doubt that's the first name we'd suggest. It's probably more like Judas or Pilate, right? But the guy we are going to look at tonight, Caiaphas, is kind of a guy that was working behind the scenes that enabled both of them to do what they were doing. He didn't do it out of love for God. He didn't even want to speak for God even though that was supposed to be his vocation in life, his role, God's high priest, God's spokesman. But he did speak for God, unwillingly, unknowingly. It took the inspired writer, John, to tell us that some of the stuff that came out of Caiaphas' mouth was actually prophetic words even though he didn't know it.

But as you take a look at Caiaphas, you see a schemer, a manipulator, a political beast in a religious role who had great power when it came to Jerusalem and Judea at the time of Jesus. As the high priest, he came about the position not in the way God had intended it, by being the son of the high priest. He was appointed to it by the Roman governor before Pilate. But as the high priest, he was respected by the people as a religious leader and in his role as a religious leader, he had access to all that temple tax that the people had to pay when they came to Jerusalem for those three feasts they were supposed to come to each year. So he had the temple treasury strings at his

beck and call. Among the Jews, he was very powerful. The Romans put him where he was and to remain in their favor, he did what they wanted. He was also the head of the Ruling Council, a very important position on the Ruling Council, so politically he was very powerful also. That was the only real political body left for the Jews since the Romans were ruling over them.

So he's a religious leader and he knows all the lingo. He could say all the right things. He knows the sacrifices inside and out. I suppose he had to in order to be the high priest. He could tell you all the stuff, I would guess. In order to carry out his role as high priest, he would have had to been able to. He would have had to learn all these things and think of so many of these things that were sacrifices and various rituals and rites that pointed ahead to the Messiah to come. He could probably recite them better than you guys could when you sat there for Examination Sunday. But being able to give the right answer isn't the same thing as living the right answer, is it? Being able to spit out the right thing like a parrot, that doesn't mean it's living in your heart. From what we know about Caiaphas, he appears to have been a member of the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were the modernists of the day, the real advanced, sophisticated people. The modernists, the rationalists...you couldn't prove to them there was life after death, so there was no life after death. They didn't believe in the resurrection. If there's no resurrection, then sin doesn't really matter anymore, does it?

This promise of a Messiah to come who will have an eternal kingdom...if you paid any attention to the words at all, he had to apply it only to the here and now, not the hereafter, not forgiveness that would come "by his wounds, we are healed" like we heard last week. That wouldn't be what he was looking for because in his role, he was a practical guy, a modernist, a rationalist, all these things, so he rejected all the things that Jesus stood for. Jesus' message was "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near." Repent to him made no sense because there's nothing to repent from because it's only here and now. So he had to view Jesus as some kook who could do some really amazing things. And it was just flat out becoming inconvenient for him and for the other members of the Sanhedrin.

I suppose Caiaphas, as a modernist, a rationalist, there's a lot of them today. If you go and pick up a Newsweek or a Time right about Easter, they'll put Jesus on the front cover. You can read in there and you'll read about modern day Caiaphases that don't believe there's a resurrection of the dead, that Jesus was just a revolutionary. He was just this. He was just that. But a true resurrection of the body, no, that doesn't take place. You and I can go over the long list of all the false teachings that come that are just like Caiaphas' that are in the American church today and it's good that we know them, but the question that we really need to ask ourselves is, where do we want to be a modernist or a rationalist when Jesus says something to us for our life that we understand and just don't like? When he tells us to do something that we don't want to do, when he tells us not to do something that we want to do, where are our places that we are going to say, "Sure God, you tell us that the reason you leave us here on earth is to share your gospel and to go out into all the world and make disciples for time and

for eternity and you tell us that we're supposed to do both nurture and outreach, but you know what? We're really just more comfortable with nurture. So if they don't find us, the hell with them." Is it really that much different than denying the resurrection? It's denying something God has told us to do, isn't it?

Yes, there are a lot of people out there today that rub shoulders with Caiaphas and with some of his denials, but we have to look out for where we are denying God's will for our lives.

Caiaphas and the leaders of the Sanhedrin, they see the problem that is Jesus. They recognize it as a problem. They come together. They have this meeting. They have to have this big, special fancy meeting. They are all torn up. "What are we accomplishing? We are talking and talking at this meeting, and nothing is getting done. We see what he is doing. We see the miracles. We see how the people are following him. And if it keeps on going this way, all the people are going to follow him. If they proclaim him a king like they're talking about, he's talking about this eternal kingdom, the Romans are going to come in and take both our place and our nation. And our temple will be gone and everything that we as this group believe in will be gone."

So Caiaphas has to stand up and basically bark at them. He stands up and says, "You know nothing at all! You're agonizing about what you should do about this guy. You don't understand. You have to kill him for the good of the people. It's better that one man die than the whole nation be lost. That's obvious. You just don't have the backbone to do it." That's basically what Caiaphas is saying to them.

That's where our God tells us that Caiaphas didn't know the truth that he was speaking. Sometimes God works in spite of us, not through us, not because of us, but in spite of us. That's certainly what he did with Caiaphas.

One man or the nation...it seemed obvious. So Caiaphas said some drastic action needs to be done. He finds Judas or Judas finds him, whichever it is, but he comes to this arrangement. He sets up a mock trial. It's a fake trial, an unlawful trial, at an unlawful time of the night that goes against everything that the law stood for, and he lines up a bunch of false witnesses and they can't even get themselves to agree on anything. So finally, this guy, this parrot, who knew all the words but didn't know what they mean said, "Here's what I can do. I can use this kook Jesus, his devotion to God against him." When he's sick of it all, he throws up his arms and says, "I put you under oath by the living God. Tell me, are you the Christ of God?" "I'm going to use God against this religious nut job" is what he had to be thinking.

So here's Jesus, put under oath by the ruling government that has the right to put him under oath. Now his silence is broken. Now he answers him. "Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you...in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus confessed who he was

and Caiaphas got what he wanted. He put on the show of tearing his robes and saying, "You've heard the blasphemy." And he acted appalled at this blasphemy. Inwardly he knew he had won, at least the victory he wanted.

Jesus was dragged off. Pilate was manipulated. The mob was manipulated. Caiaphas kept his manipulations going until Jesus died and the curtain in the temple was torn in two. The sun stopped shining. The grave was open. The dead came out. You kind of wonder if any of that gave Caiaphas pause.

Caiaphas the manipulator. In your life, have you ever found yourself trying to manipulate God? Have you ever had the arrogance to say to God, "God, if you do this for me, I'll do whatever for you." In your thoughts or in your words... "Lord, if I give more to the church, help me in this area of my life. Lord, if I do more at the church, help me in this area of my life." Do we really think that the God that made heaven and earth, the God that can cause the earth to cease in the blink of an eye really needs anything from us? Really? Are we that misunderstanding to think we can manipulate God? More importantly, do we forget that we don't have to manipulate God? Do we forget that it's not in our hands, that it's in his. And when it's in his hands, do we forget what his hands have done? They stretched out on the cross. They took the nails. They carried all of our sins. They took the guilt of our sins away for even the times we do these foolish things and think these foolish things. I don't have to manipulate him because he has already loved me more than anyone could possibly love me. He's done the same for you.

Let's not rub shoulders with Caiaphas. Let's not deny what God says is true. Let's not turn away from what God has appointed us to do. Let's not try to manipulate him. Let's just stand in awe of his grace and his love and his mercy that loves us in spite of who we are, that forgives us in spite of who we are. He has made us what we are...people that are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, people that stand shoulder to shoulder, not with Caiaphas, but we're rubbing shoulders with God himself. He became one of us. He calls us brother. And he says he'll be with us and he'll take care of us.

So stop scheming and start trusting God.