**John 11:45-53 February 24, 2021**

**Midweek Lent I: Witnesses on the Road to Golgotha**

**Caiaphas**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Midweek Lent Series this year is titled, “Witnesses on the Road to Golgotha” We begin this evening by looking at Caiaphas, the High Priest at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus after being arrested in the garden is brought to Caiaphas who puts on a show. He trots out false witnesses who can’t even get their story straight, he asks pointed questions to incriminate Jesus, and finally, in a false sense of shock, he tears his robes and sends Jesus away to Pontius Pilate where he will be charged with blasphemy, the penalty of which is death. Caiaphas is a big deal, the High Priest wasn’t someone that didn’t matter. Our specific Gospel lesson tonight touches on Caiaphas’s revelation concerning Jesus Christ earlier in the Gospel of John and a very simple concept. Caiaphas was witness to the ministry of Jesus and figured something out. Somebody was gonna have to die for the whole system to continue. And this leader of leaders, again not a priest but the high priest makes the executive decision, that if someone is going to have to take the fall and be sacrificed for the good of the entire Jewish nation, it wasn’t going to be him, it was going to be Jesus. In this we see ourselves and the core lesson to be learned in this time of contemplation from the life of Jesus up against the life of Caiaphas in comparison. Here we see how Caiaphas, a witness on the road to Golgotha, was actually guilty of Jesus being crucified in the place of the skull.

Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. What greater sign could the world expect to see that would give testimony that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah, the one promised by God to Adam and Eve who would crush the head of the serpent? Our text tells us that many who had seen what Jesus had done believed in Him. That’s exactly as it should have been, for only by the power of God which was His own to command could Jesus have raised Lazarus from the dead. But there were some witnesses who were not as impressed with Jesus or His power. They went to the Pharisees with their eyewitness account of the raising of Lazarus, and this caused a stir. Jesus was becoming a problem for these men. The people were seeing the signs and wonders Jesus performed, and they were believing in Him. They feared the loss of their influence. They feared the loss of their positions. And they feared their Roman overlords and their reaction to this Jesus and his influence over the people. After all, the crowds might claim Jesus as their king, and the Romans would surely see such a figure as a threat to their power and could use that as an excuse to destroy Jerusalem and, indeed, the whole nation of Israel. That could not be allowed to happen! They could not help but acknowledge that Jesus had the power and authority to do what He did, but they hardened their hearts against what that power and authority meant. Acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah did not serve their selfish purposes, and so they did not let themselves accept the truth.

Caiaphas was the high priest that year, and as he listened to the council he grew more and more perturbed. The council was missing the most convenient solution. Finally he lashed out. Speaking with all his authority as high priest, he said, “You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” Caiaphas candidly raised the possibility of the officially-sanctioned, cold-blooded murder of Jesus. He buried it under the passive word “die”, softening the harshness of his suggestion. Nevertheless he asserted that, since Jesus was the one ultimately responsible for their unrest, since Jesus was the one causing their problems, this Jesus should be killed—and killed quickly—so that Israel would be spared. This was the most obvious, most practical solution to their Jesus problem. In doing so they would rid themselves of this meddlesome Jesus; their authority as the religious leaders would be secured; and they would prove their loyalty to their Roman governor.

Even a broken clock is right twice a day. Caiaphas was right, but he was right for all the wrong reasons. The evangelist wrote, “He did not say this on his own authority.” He was high priest; and even though he was speaking selfishly in suggesting and authorizing this action with evil intent in his heart, as high priest his words had God-given authority behind them. This hateful and evil saying was actually a prophecy from God, a prophecy not only concerning the nation of Israel but also for all those who would believe in Jesus who were dispersed among all the nations of the world. He was speaking a prophecy that the sacrifice of Jesus would benefit both Jew and Gentile, all those who believed in the Christ. That should have meant something to Caiaphas. As high priest he should have been the first to rise up and give welcome to the promised Messiah, greeting Jesus as the fulfillment of everything a high priest of the Old Testament covenant was supposed to want. But Caiaphas was only interested in his own authority, his own idea of what was good for the people of God.

How do you receive the Messiah? How do you respond to His Word? You have heard the eyewitness accounts of John who recorded the Word and the signs and wonders of Jesus. The Church in our day still has those who, like Caiaphas and the council, hear the Word and receive the first-hand testimony from eyewitnesses like Matthew and John and Paul, but they disregard that testimony for their own wisdom. This is the promised Messiah, the One who crushed the head of the satanic serpent; but it’s so much easier to believe that your own works and your own desires are best. It’s so much easier to believe that you can do something to earn your salvation. It would be so much simpler if you could control your own salvation. The will of God becomes a dreadful thing, as if submitting to God’s will means that you will suffer merely for the sake of suffering.

But God has something different in mind—for Caiaphas and for you. You may remember the account of Joseph: we looked at his life in comparison to Christ’s a few years ago during Lent, we saw how his brothers sold him into slavery. When everything was resolved, Joseph told his brothers, “As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people.” In the same way, Caiaphas meant evil for Jesus. Indeed, the Father allowed the high priest’s evil plan to succeed. But instead of delivering the council from the Romans by eliminating a popular teacher and miracle worker, the sacrifice of Jesus atones for the sins of all people, delivering you and all the faithful from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

It is expedient that one Man should die for the people. That one Man, Jesus Christ, died as the Lamb of God, the blood offering that ended the world’s need for a high priest to offer sacrifices for the people. Caiaphas got what he wanted, but he lost everything that mattered to him. He lost his authority and position, for Jesus now is the one true High Priest. He is the High Priest and the Sacrificial Offering all in one. The Temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed; but the new Israel, the Holy Christian Church, is alive. It lives, for one Man—our Lord Jesus Christ—died for all people. And because He raised you up with Himself through Holy Baptism, you who live and believe in Him will never die. May that be the lesson from Caiaphas, that our own horrible schemes can still work good where God wills, and that we don’t need a High Priest as they did back in the days of Caiaphas, we need Christ, the Priest of Priests, the Sacrificer and Sacrifice himself, the one who gives himself for us to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. We need only to think and believe in him.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.