"The Silence and Sufficiency"
Mark 14:55-65

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Ash Wednesday
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Boise, Idaho
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I. Prophet, Priest and King

It is a strange sight to behold. The Prophet of prophets stands in the midst of the assembly, the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious council. The Prophet of prophets stands before them, but not to speak. He is present to be spoken against. As we heard in the psalm, so it is fulfilled: False witnesses rise up against Him and accuse Him: "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" It isn't true, of course; Jesus has no intention of destroying the temple made of stone; when He says "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," He is speaking of His own body. But no, that isn't the testimony of these witnesses. They declare that this Prophet has promised destruction of national property, and for this He should be condemned.

The accusation is ridiculous, all the more so because the Scriptures tell us that these witnesses can't even agree with each other as they testify. A word or two from the One accused could set things straight, especially the powerful, effective Word of God that the Prophet speaks. But the Prophet does not speak. He simply stands, silent and meek. Even when they blindfold Him, beat Him and taunt, "Prophesy!" He does not open His mouth.

It is humiliating, shameful, far more than the Prophet deserves. He is innocent like no other. But despite the undeserved beatings, mockeries and condemnation, His Father looks down from heaven and declares, "It is not enough."

The Prophet is not just a prophet; He is the Priest of priests as well. It is, therefore, all the more bitterly ironic that the promoters of this sham trial are priests who want Him dead. We heard in the text from Malachi this night that the priests were to keep the doctrine, to speak the truth of God; people were to look to these men for the Word of the Lord, for these priests were called by God to be His messengers.

But here, in the presence of God Incarnate, these priests are far from messengers of the truth. It is they who arranged for these false witnesses, and it is they who must be furious when their witnesses cannot settle on a story. And it is the high priest who goads Jesus after the testimony, saying to Him, "Do you answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" But the Priest of priests, the Son of God, stands meek and silent, refusing to answer the accusations. So instead, the high priest asks for an identity instead of a rebuttal: "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

It is not an accusation, but a question, and so the Priest Jesus answers: "I AM," He responds, declaring that He is in fact the Son of God, I AM Himself. He speaks meekly, cloaking His glory, for

this powerful Word could destroy these enemies if He so willed. But this is not the time for judgment: The Priest of priests goes on to declare, "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

Oddly enough, it is not the false accusations that condemn Jesus, but His confession of who He is. He is not beaten and abused because of the framed charges; He is stricken for the truth. He declares His true identity, and so He is condemned for claiming to be the Son of God. And thus condemned, the Priest of priests is silent again.

So the Prophet/Priest suffers at the hands of sinful man, enduring what He does not deserve because of their wickedness.

And the Father looks upon His Son and says, "It is not enough."

From there you know the story. The King of kings and the Lord of lords is led as prisoner before the king and lord of the region. King Herod toys with Jesus, treating Him as some sort of novelty before growing weary and sending Him away. Pilate, Caesar's representative, actually discusses kingdoms with the King of kings, and we hear in tonight's epistle that King Jesus gives the good confession before Pilate. But whenever Jesus is accused, He stands silent and does not answer those who want Him destroyed. He stands silently, though in Pilate's twisted justice this innocent Man now must undergo terrible suffering for His guiltlessness. The Son of God is given to the Roman guard and beaten beyond recognition.

And the Father looks upon His Son and says, "It is not enough."

No, Jesus Christ-the Prophet, Priest and King-has to suffer at the hands of wicked prophets, priests and kings that night. He remains silent and goes willingly to the cross. It is not enough until it is finished.

II. Silence and Sufficiency

Dear hearers in Christ, why? Why the silence of our Lord when He is bombarded with one false accusation after another? And why is His suffering not enough until His death is done? Oh, let us earnestly seek the answers to these questions. For in this grim text of our Lord's Passion, we find much to be thankful for.

Why the silence? Why does Jesus not answer His accusers?

A text that quickly comes to mind is Isaiah 53:7: He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. By His silence, the Lamb of God confirms once again that He is the fulfillment of prophecy, that He is the One who takes away the sin of the world. But why did the prophecy call for silence when the Savior was falsely accused?

Jesus remains silent because He is at work as our Savior. In His silence, He is reversing the curse brought by sin at the Fall of Man. When Adam and Eve first fell into sin, God rightly accused them of doing wrong; with their mouths, they denied the accusation, blaming each other or the serpent. Justly accused, they spoke to deny. That He might redeem sinners, when Jesus is wrongly accused,

He stays silent. While Adam and Eve tried to pass blame to avoid punishment for trying to be who they were not, Jesus accepts punishment and remains silent for being exactly who He is. He does so that He might suffer in our stead. Let us ponder this important, awesome truth a little bit more.

Jesus is accused of things that He hasn't done. He is accused of breaking the seventh commandment ("Thou shalt not steal") when He is accused of threatening to destroy the temple building. He is accused of breaking the eighth commandment because He is accused of lying. He is accused of blasphemy-of breaking the first three commandments-because He makes the good confession that He is the Son of God.

None of these accusations are true. He is not out to destroy the temple, nor has He lied. He is not guilty of the sin of blasphemy, because He is the Son of God. Yet He remains silent. Not because these accusations don't dignify a response. He remains silent because you are guilty of these sins, and the innocent Son of God is accepting the blame for the sins you have committed.

Who here has not taken or destroyed the property of another at least in thought, if not in word or deed? (Who has not wished that an enemy would lose his possessions as retribution for the wrongs he has done?) Who here has never lied, has always told the truth? Who here has not put other gods before the one true God?-for each time we sin, we are placing our will above the Word of God. It is we who are guilty. Therefore, it is we who should stand accused.

However, it is Jesus who stands silently before these accusers because He is standing there in our place. While their accusations are false against Him, they are true against us. It is we who are guilty. It is we who are rightly accused. Silently, He endures the slander. Silently, He suffers the beatings, the scourging, the torture. Silently, He goes to the cross.

But let us be clear: Jesus does not endure this because sinful men are accusing Him. He does not submit to the allegations of the wicked. Although evil mouths declare the words, far beyond them it is God the Father who is pouring the accusations upon His Son. The Lord of heaven and earth is setting the burden of the sins of the world upon the shoulders of Jesus, so that His Son can die for the sins of the world.

Therefore the Son accepts the accusations and does not answer them. While He is innocent, He accepts the guilt and the sin as His own, for He is standing in our place for our sin. From there He is led out of the city, bearing His cross; but He bears a greater burden-the sins of the world. Your sins, too.

Dear Christians, ponder the silence of our Lord as He stands accused, and do not dismiss the silence that continues as He is beaten, mocked, scourged and crucified. This is for you, and for your salvation. Do not imagine that those sins that you have "gotten away with" have no price to them; the wages of sin is death, and Jesus has paid the horrific price for you. Do not take lightly these sufferings of Jesus, lest you take lightly the forgiveness He has won.

But despite the sufferings before false prophets, wicked priests and unjust kings, these sufferings are not enough. Why? Why is it not enough for Jesus to suffer? Why does He have to die?

As we have just mentioned, the wages of sin is death; and our Lord had to die to finish the job of our salvation. What would His suffering benefit us if He had come down from the cross and saved

Himself? Less suffering before death? We do not know, but we would still have to die all the same. The Son dies so that we do not have to die for the sins we have committed.

And because the Son dies for those sins, our salvation is certain. When goaded by the question, "How much must I suffer for my sin before I can be forgiven?", rejoice to answer "None at all, for Christ Jesus has suffered for me." When tempted by the thought, "How much good must I do to earn the forgiveness Jesus has won?", confess with confidence, "None, for Christ has done all good by standing in my place, taking the accusations upon Himself and dying my death for me."

Yes, dear hearers, rejoice-for now enough has been done. God will not forsake you now! He has already given His Son to redeem you from sin and death; He will not overlook this heavy price and neglect you now. Enough has been done for your salvation. We know that it is enough: We hear Jesus Himself say so when He utters "It is finished" just before death.

It is enough because it is finished. Your salvation is sure.

So, dear Christians, what should we learn from the Word of the Lord this night?

First, ponder the passion of the Lord and meditate upon it, that you might realize the consequence of your sin. Those transgressions that you got away with didn't get away-they were added to the burden of Christ, your Lord. Do not take sin lightly-ponder the sufferings of your Savior.

Ponder, and rejoice. Enough has been done, and it is finished. The Lord has won your salvation by His suffering. He endured shame so that He could take your shame away. He was spit upon that He might wash us clean. He allowed Himself to be blindfolded that He might give us sight unto salvation. He allowed His face to be disfigured so that He might return to you the image of God. Give thanks to God, for Christ stood silent. And because He silently accepted the accusations for your sin, you will not stand before God on Judgment Day silent with shame. No, you will stand before God as one redeemed, and the Father will declare to you, "My Son has done enough. It is finished. Enter into the kingdom of heaven."

O Lord Jesus Christ, You who for the sake of our sin were falsely accused, rescue us from the accusation of the Law and of my conscience; You who remained silent in the face of false accusations, help us so that we do not have to be silent before God's judgment; You who in an innocent manner were shamed and spit on, rescue us from the eternal disgrace and shame; let Your innocent, suffering condemnation be our eternal acquittal. Amen (Gerhard, An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, p. 137)