

Sermon Archive 194

Good Friday - 30 March 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13-15, 53:7-9

Luke 22:39 - 23:56

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



A Reflection: "They shut their mouths"

Cat got your tongue?

Go on! Say something!

No, I thought not.

It was prophesied that you'd have nothing to say. You'd just see him. You'd maybe stammer that no one had told you that this was happening. And having uttered that lie, you'd shut your mouth. You didn't need to say it was because you didn't wish to incriminate yourself. That was obvious. There was so much you didn't have to say. You have nothing to say - shut your mouth.

-ooOoo-

Pontius Pilate. Shut your mouth. You are law and order. You'd think that that might have meant justice. For God's sake, you met him. You asked him questions. You heard his answers. You knew that he was innocent. But what to do with the protestors? What's the quickest way back to peace? (Peace? You know nothing of peace - this isn't peace! Just shut your mouth!)

You're a talented man. You wouldn't have got to where you are by not being. Someone, somewhere identified something of leadership quality in you. Was it character? Commitment to Roman ideals? Or

was it just an unusual ruthlessness suited well to hatchet jobbing? Maybe. So maybe you don't really care about truth. Maybe you don't concern yourself with justice. Yes, you told them that he was innocent. "I find no crime", you said. Justice made a whimpering effort. So as you handed him over, how utterly cheap those words became. Now we know that whatever you say about justice, and rule of law, and fairness and truth, none of it means anything. You are totally pragmatic, totally compromised. You stand for nothing. You have nothing to say. So just shut your mouth. Just shut it.

-ooOoo-

Herod Antipas. Irrelevant king of some small irrelevant province - but quite nicely dressed. Herod Antipas. Part of an old order well and truly overtaken in a faster world. Herod Antipas, beheader of John the Baptist. Herod Antipas, vain, ridiculous, hanging out to witness a miracle. Well, guess what I saw the other day! Some water turned to wine! A pearl found inside a fish! All manner of cheap thrill and entertainment. Not sure what it means, but I'd like to see it. Others saw it, so I should too. But all I got to see was some bedraggled peasant. I got to ask him a few questions, poke a little fun. I got to suggest that he couldn't do miracles anymore, if he'd ever been able to. God, we all laughed. I'm far too stupid to know the word "schadenfreude", but that's what I meant. He was so little and dirty; not important like me.

Herod Antipas, just shut your mouth. Take a leaf out of the book of that dignified and beautiful man who before your questions was silent. What was that about pearls before swine? You are corrupt, morally bankrupt, incapable of empathy, blind to real nobility. Your commentary insults you, and every person who could have spoken richly but just dribbled inane nonsense. Shut your mouth. Before this momentous event, you have nothing to say.

-ooOoo-

And you, the chief priests and scribes. A while back, he described you well when (in your direction) he cried out “hypocrites!” Hypocrites . . . Pragmatic Pilate may have done a terrible thing, but he never pretended to stand for anything other than pragmatism. Herod may have outed himself as an idiot. He wouldn’t have had the capacity to present himself in any other way. Transparency is the idiot’s privilege. But you! You pretended to care about God! You spoke of righteousness, faithful obedience. You talked about fidelity and truth. And all the while you were working the room, spreading the lie, trapping the man you knew was innocent. Your words don’t just mean nothing. You use them as poison. You defecate on them, and chuck them at others. Your words are filthy. You don’t care whether they’re true. You just use them anyway - always and ever to promote yourselves.

So when he stands before you, this momentous event, don’t you dare speak! It is prophesied that the kings of the earth won’t speak. They will shut their mouths. If you dare speak after what you have done to this man, you will show that you are no kings. In the words of your psalm-writing ancestor “you are worms, not people”. You have nothing to say. Just shut your mouth.

-ooOoo-

And you, second criminal on the cross. Of you it is said you spent your last energy, your last allocation of breath, to mocking the man crucified next to you. You’re so full of anger that anything you say is hurtful and cruel. How did you come to this? What you have to say just now has no place in this moment. So for the peace of the man you’re deriding, for the sake of your own dignity in death, please shut your mouth. Hold that tongue. He’s not your enemy. Just shhh.

-ooOoo-

And you, Peter. You who said to Jesus “You are the Messiah”, your lips have served him well. You have said beautiful things. Tonight, as the accusations are leveled at you, and fear expands in your heart (God, don’t let it explode), your words might go into overdrive, free-fall, no, don’t let them fall. From heights of love, and friendship, and faith, and hope, and loyalty, don’t let them fall. Peter, my friend, lest you say something awful, something like “I don’t know him”, just shut your mouth. Please, Peter, shut your mouth.

-ooOoo-

And now to you, you people of God, I don’t know that I have anything to say. What do you say to the death of a good and innocent man when no one is listening? What do you say to the momentous mistake before us? It’s like on a Good Friday we all lose the right, the capacity, the will to speak - for what can be said? To justify? To explain? To undo? We have nothing to say.

Just as there were many who were astonished at him - so marred was his appearance -so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him.

-ooOoo-

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