

“Places of the Passion – The Trial – A Place of God’s Will”

This year’s Lenten series is entitled, “Places of the Passion.” It is a reminder that we find God in the strangest places. We find Him in a crib, on a cross and in a tomb. No matter where the place, God is there.

As we look at the various places we see both our sin and our Savior. As we look at the various places we learn something about humanity about ourselves and about God.

We live in a world of trials. Not just trials in a courtroom but trials in everyday life. As we look at our trials we find out how much we change based on circumstances, how we act based on emotion and feelings. As we look at Jesus’ trial we see how God’s will to redeem us never changes.

The text says that Pilate turned Him over to their will. The real question tonight is when we find ourselves in the midst of trials do we seek to do God’s will or our own. In the trial, in our text, we see people fighting against the will of God and yet God’s will to redeem us remains strong.

Just before our text we see the changing will of Peter who vowed he’d never deny him and then did just that. Crowds that have been amazed at Jesus’ teaching are now stirred up. Herod who wanted to see miracles now ridicules the man he admired. His Savior becomes his enemy. Pilate, his former enemy becomes his friend. Pilate said again and again Jesus has done nothing wrong. Yet Pilate still handed Him over to their will.

By all of his actions Pilate knew the right thing to do but didn’t do it.

The apostle Paul admitted to being like Pilate. The good that I would I

do not do.

The problems in life most often do not come about because we don't know what to do. Rather we find ourselves in the midst of trials, we are outnumbered, we are pressured, we are ridiculed, we are stressed and we change and act contrary to God's will.

In the midst of our trials, including those not in the courtroom, we act based on emotion rather than faith. Faith is taking God at His Word but in the midst of our trials we question the facts – about God's love, God's forgiveness, God's faithfulness and God's promises.

We act based on feelings and emotions. Since feelings and emotions change does that mean God's will changes? Can we know we are right based on our feelings? Is our will the same as God's will?

New Year's resolutions are a clear indication that our wills, our intentions, our good intentions are often set to the side. Instead of acting based on what we know to be right we act based on anger, fear, hatred, sorrow or even excitement.

Young people "feel sure" they are in love, so they marry on impulse, then regret it. People become afraid and "feel sure" they hear a thief, so they shoot and kill a family member. Strong emotions may lead to adultery, killing, stealing, and other evils.

In today's world trials are not always determined by the facts but by the strategies of the lawyers, the emotions of the people, the intentions of the witnesses or even the biases of the judge.

We would expect Luke's account of the trial of Jesus would strike us as radically different. Luke begins his Gospel by saying that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning. He tells us he desired to write "an orderly account" (1:3).

Surprisingly, however, Luke's account doesn't sound all that different. As Luke records the trial of Jesus, he spends a great amount of time telling

us about the people, the emotions, and the behind-the-scenes movements surrounding the case.

As we look at Pilate, Herod the anger of the chief priests and teachers of the law. Luke teaches us the facts of a fallen world. Luke asks you to confess the truth about yourself. Our will often changes due to our feelings, our surroundings or the crowd. We desire our will more than God's.

Luke knows that the trial is not about establishing Jesus' innocence. That is firmly established. Pilate himself finds no reason to crucify this man. The matter in question is "Why is an innocent man condemned to die?"

And to this, Luke gives an answer in the last sentence of this section: Pilate "delivered Jesus over to their will" (23:25). "Their will." That is the fact, the glimpse of the fallen world that Luke gives us. It is the will of a fallen world that its God should die. Luke invites us to look within our human heart this evening and confess the fact that by nature we want our God to die so that our will can be done.

Jesus says, "The spirit is willing but the body is weak" (cf. Matthew 26:41). It's easy in church to will the peace of God for all people; it's harder, however, to act on that when you have not been treated fairly. It's easy in church to want to help the poor, but it's hard to do that when you see an advertisement for that new flat-screen TV, besides, you work hard for the money you earn. It is easy to simply come into church and say one thing and then go out into the world and do another. Our will and our behavior constantly change but Jesus' remains faithful.

This trial of Jesus is about more than the changing will of humans. It is also about the eternal will of God. This evening, God enters a place filled with the battles of human wills and transforms it to be a place of His eternal will.

Even as Jesus is mocked we see God's will being fulfilled. The death of Jesus is part of God's eternal will. God so desires to save all people that

He sends His own Son to suffer in their place. This is the will of God. In the midst of the mocking the humiliation, the pain, the injustice Jesus remains faithful. He remains committed to God's Word, God's will and God's promises.

Our world is indeed a world of trials. Not just in the courtroom. The trials of unemployment, divorce, sickness, grief. Trials go on all the time. Week after week, people make judgments against God. Sometimes, it receives national attention as courtroom dramas debate the rights of Christians to witness to their Savior. Other times, it goes unnoticed: In the office, around the lunch table, during the first year of college. People repeatedly subject Jesus to a trial and deny Him to be their Lord. For the world around us, Jesus is not God, and He certainly is not the only way of salvation.

Wherever people with a changing will fight against God, God's will never changes. God comes among them, fighting for their salvation. In the courts of Jerusalem, here at St. James and here in Quincy are people whose wills are ever changing, we are people who know what to do and do not do it.

In the midst of the world's sin and our sin God's eternal will doesn't change. He continues to seek us in His love. In this Lenten season we behold His will and the wonders of His love. Jesus is pronounced guilty, Jesus is punished, Jesus dies because He is fully committed to God's will to redeem the world.

Here at the place of Jesus trial we learn that our will is constantly changing and that our ultimate desire by nature is for our God to die. Here at Jesus' trial we also see God's unchanging will to give His only Son into death that we might not perish.