

Condemned by the Righteous

In our "24 Hours that Changed the World" Lenten worship series, we've shared in the Last Supper in the Upper Room and prayed with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We move next to the trial of Jesus at the palace of the High Priest, who at that time was a man named Caiaphas. The High Priest was the leader of the Jewish ruling body called the Sanhedrin, a group of 70 of the most influential and well-thought-of religious men of the time.

Jesus was put on trial that night for a variety of reasons, but none of them held up to the Jewish law, which called for agreement of the testimony of more than one witness before any kind of punishment. Eventually, the charge that stuck was blasphemy, one that was punishable by death. Jesus had claimed to be God, and the religious leaders simply could not fathom that this might indeed be true. Yes, it was part of the greater plan that Jesus had to go to the cross and die. So, someone had to sentence him to die that way. But, to know that the most influential religious leaders of his day played such a large part in making it happen always bothers me when I get to this part of the story.

I've read many books and articles lately that try to make sense of what's happening in our own cultural landscape here in America. We wonder why participation in the life of the Church has declined so much over the years. There are many reasons we can point to, but sadly, many of those have to do with people's perceptions of us religious people. One of those perceptions is that religious people can be very judgmental, looking down upon those who do not agree with their views. One group of people in our culture is now known as the 'dones' as in "I'm DONE with participating in the life of the church." These are people who were once part of our faith communities, but who had a bad experience or saw things that were much more ugly than beautiful about the public witness of people called Christians. I'm saddened that so many people feel that way, that they don't feel safe being around religious people.

When I look back at Jesus' life, I see something quite the opposite happening. For the most part, Jesus seemed to connect with ordinary, broken people just as well as, or maybe even better than, he connected overtly religious people. Other than the Pharisees and the members of the Sanhedrin like Nicodemus, who sought Jesus out in the dark of night (John 3) and Joseph of Arimethia, who provided the tomb where Jesus body would be buried (Mark 15), we don't hear a lot about the lives of religious people being transformed. On the other hand, we see plenty of instances.

Blessings,

Pastor David

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