

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, May 16, 2024

Today is Thursday, May 16 and we are studying the Gospel of John chapter eighteen.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and Loving God, in the morning I lift my heart to praise you. I pause at the beginning of this upcoming day to seek your presence and put you first. Thank you for always being with me and reminding me that you are working all things together for my good. Help me still my scattered thoughts, calm my breath and focus on your loving kindness. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. John 18:19-24

REFLECTION

Before Jesus is taken to the high priest Caiaphas for questioning by the Sanhedrin, Annas, the longtime "high priest emeritus" interrogates Jesus on his own. He quizzes Jesus about his teaching and his disciples. Exactly what have you been saying and teaching and who are your closest associates? Jesus basically answers, "Go and ask the people who heard me, they will tell you. Nothing has been secret." That gets him a slap on the face. Violence has begun and it escalates from here.

Annas is outmaneuvered and can't get anywhere with his questioning. Jesus' integrity is too great. In frustration, Annas sends him on to his son-in-law Caiaphas (the current high priest) and the full weight of the gathered Sanhedrin. There is no record in John of this interrogation by Caiaphas. Matthew provides a good account in his Gospel (Matthew 26:57-68). This is a hastily convened night meeting. They were looking for false evidence and these were to be trumped up charges. Even though false witnesses came forward and lied, they still didn't have anything on him.

The High Priest determines Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy. That is what he is charged with and death is the determined punishment. This trial took place in the wee hours of the morning. He was arrested Thursday evening and tried Thursday night. Because the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday night, if they wanted him executed it needed to happen quickly.

It is believed that after the interrogation by the Sanhedrin, Jesus was kept in a cell beneath Caiaphas' house overnight. In Jerusalem today, there are excavated caves beneath the house and one is known as the Sacred Pit. It is also called Caiaphas' dungeon. This is thought to be where Jesus spent the night before the crucifixion, bound and alone. Darkness and evil seem to have the upper hand at this point in the story and tomorrow it will only grow worse. I consider the dark times in my own life and the dark places in our world, when it seems like evil is winning, injustice has the upper hand, violence is growing, hate is festering, and there is no hope in sight.

Ask: When I go through my own dark seasons, how does the story of Jesus' suffering speak to my life? When the world seems to be in the dark night of Caiaphas' dungeon, how might I put my hope in the Light of the World?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, you promise me that you are always with me and I am never alone. Even in times of uncertainty, darkness and fear, when I feel bound by circumstances and outraged by the behavior of others, you bring light and hope. Even when the world around me seems to give in to darkness and sin, you are shining your light. Remind me to put my trust in you no matter what the world brings. Give me the assurance of your presence and the peace that passes understanding. Amen.