

A Midweek Sermon for the Week of Lent III  
St. Luke 22:66-71 & 23:50-56  
by Peter Bockoven

The Text

**66** At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. **67** “If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, **68** and if I asked you, you would not answer. **69** But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” **70** They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You say that I am.” **71** Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”

**50** Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, **51** who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. **52** Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body. **53** Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. **54** It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. **55** The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. **56** Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

The Sermon

“Joseph Buries Jesus.”

1. Because of the council’s condemnation.
2. In hope of Jesus’ resurrection.

The world is a strange thing. I’ve been alive in it for over 25 years. And I’ve called no other place my home. And yet, at times, I still can’t wrap my head around it.

It’s a beautiful place. On a sunny day, we can see Mt. Rainier in full view. If you visit Chambers Bay on a clear day, you can see the sun setting against the water. Spring seems to be slowly returning: we can hear more of the birds singing outside again.

But it’s also an ugly place. In many ways, it just doesn’t work the way it was meant to. Last week on Tuesday, I was sitting in the Conference Room at my desk. I saw at least 50, maybe more police cars go speeding south on Pacific Avenue. They were responding to the shooting that I’m sure many of you heard of. Two officers were trying to arrest a man, and a shooting broke out. The suspect lost his life. One police officer was greatly injured. And the other ended up losing his life.

Why is the world this way? Why doesn’t the world just “work?” What is our place in the world, and what do we hope for, despite the things that happen in the world?

It is with these questions in mind, that the story of Joseph burying Jesus is so comforting.

The council of the elders, high priests, and teachers of the law, condemned Jesus to be put to death. They took his words, and twisted their meaning, to make a case for Jesus' blasphemy against God.

Why did they do this? What caused them to hate Jesus so much?

Ultimately, because they were not of the same mind as Jesus. They were not friends, but enemies of the truth he was preaching. Jesus preached the truth without any reservation. At times, that meant he opposed the leaders at Jerusalem to their face. At one time Jesus was so bold in opposing them, he called them the sons of the Devil (John 8). The devil opposes the truth, and tries to drive people away from Christ. Ultimately, the council condemned him, because they were under the devil's influence.

The text tells us that Joseph was a member of the council that condemned him. We can assume, then, that Joseph was present at Jesus' trial. That he observed the false witnesses that came to condemn Christ. That he saw how Christ was mocked and abused following his sham-conviction. But the text tells us that he didn't consent to their decision. In his heart, he recognized the injustice, and didn't want it to happen. Because he was a secret follower of Jesus. Because of his position, he may have felt unable to publicly profess his faith. So Joseph, though he didn't consent to the evil, was part of a group that produced the evil.

We see that the council is just like the world we live in. Without Christ, the world is not under him, and opposes the truth. It's under another ruler, as Jesus says in John 12: that he would cast out the "ruler of this world" by his death and crucifixion. The ruler Jesus speaks of is the Devil, as Revelation 12 shows us.

This is why the world so often doesn't "work." The devil rules it in subtle ways, leading people into unbelief and harmful works.

And the council also shows us who is in the world. Unbelievers and believers together. We are not of the world. We don't consent inwardly to the harmful works of the world. But we're in the world. We're members of it. Just like Joseph was a member of the council, but didn't consent to its condemnation of Jesus.

Because believers, though they are in the world, are ultimately ruled by Christ. They are in his kingdom. The kingdom of Christ isn't of the world. It doesn't come from the world and isn't governed by the world. So Jesus says to Pilate in John 18. That is, Jesus' kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. It rules by spiritual things and gives spiritual things to spiritual people.

But these spiritual people, ruled by Christ, are in the world. So Jesus said to his church before his ascension: "Go into all the world, and proclaim the gospel" (Mark 16).

So what is the world? This present age, and the two groups of people in it: those under the devil, and those under Christ.

That's why the world doesn't "work." It is by nature under the influence of the devil. And we're right in the middle of it. We see the harm the world produces, and are connected to it. And at times we also produce harm in the world, because of our sinful flesh.

But do we live in such a world? It can be so disheartening. We get tired of doing chores in our homes, sometimes. We clean a room just for it to get dirty again. Sometimes we wonder: "What's the point?" That's what it's like living in the world sometimes. We look at the mess in the world and wonder: "What's the point?"

There is a point. There is a reason.

After Jesus' death, the text tells us that Joseph went to bury Jesus. He did this secretly, of course. And John's gospel tells us that another secret follower also joined him: Nicodemus the Pharisee.

The text doesn't tell us explicitly *why* Joseph went to bury Jesus. But the gospels tell us that Jesus frequently taught about his resurrection from the dead. And Joseph, being a member of the council, surely knew the Scriptures well. And they make so many promises about the resurrection of the Christ.

So we can safely assume that Joseph buried Jesus with the promises about the resurrection in his mind.

So in Joseph burying Jesus we see these two things. We see him accepting what had happened. His council condemned him. His teacher was unjustly killed. And there Joseph was, holding his dead master in his arms. He acknowledged the great evil that happened: there was no escaping it.

But he laid him to rest in a prepared tomb, expecting the resurrection of Jesus to follow. So Joseph acknowledged the evil that had been done; but he also expected the reversal of that evil by Jesus' rising to life again.

Here in Joseph we see the church. The church has received the Word and Spirit of God. So our consciences have begun to be sharpened again. We are beginning to realize what truly pleases God, and what truly displeases him. Nicodemus saw the full extent of the injustice when he held Jesus in his arms. So we also see the full extent of evil in the world and in our own hearts since God's truth in his word has been shown to our heart.

And this is also how we see the church in Joseph. We live next to the many injustices and evils of the world, with hope in our heart. Evil and injustice won't win. Because it's been defeated already.

Some people devote their whole life to fighting public evils and injustices. And sometimes they get extremely burdened by their work, and disheartened, when it seems like they make no progress.

But take heart, dear Christian. The evils that happen in the world are not winning. They never were. And they never will. Because Jesus has overcome the world (John 16). The injustice he suffered — condemnation and death — never won. Instead, Jesus used them to obtain the

ultimate victory. He used them to go through death, to pay for our sins, and to rise back from the dead and destroy the power of death over us.

The other evils in this world are working in the same way. Jesus is using them, curbing them and restraining them, as he directs his creation to its ultimate redemption. Jesus is going to come back and restore all things. He's going to raise up all the dead and give all believers in him eternal life. He's going to place you in his kingdom there, where only justice and goodness and life will be.

That's why St. Paul was so bold to say in Romans 8 that the sufferings of this present age are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.

So in Joseph's burial of Jesus, we see the world and the church. It's hard to live in the world as the church. The world, and our flesh with the world, produces evil. But evil won't win. Jesus our gracious Lord will ultimately reverse all the evils of this present age and bring in a new age of eternal happiness and peace. Just as he did with his resurrection, so will he do at the final resurrection. Thanks be to God. Amen.