

John 11:47-53

How do you thank a man who rescues a friend from death? Send him a card? Treat him to a meal? How about—plot to kill him? In Jesus case they chose the third option. He had just raised Lazarus from the dead. Four days in the tomb and Jesus calls him to life. And what thanks does He get? The Pharisees along with the Sanhedrin begin to plan how to put Jesus to death.

It's not that Lazarus was a hated man. In raising him to life Jesus was not returning a terrorist back into society. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. And it was big news when he was resurrected, as it would be today. No newspapers or evening new shows back then, but word spread quickly. And many, because of it were believing in Jesus.

It was a sign and everyone knew it. Dead people don't come back from the grave. This Jesus must be the Messiah. The signs all pointed to Him. Even the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin could read the signs. So what do you do when God's Messiah is living in your midst? What do you do when God Himself is at work among His people?

They were frustrated, bewildered, angry. They couldn't stop Jesus. They had tried many times—tricking Him with their clever questions; making Him look foolish before the people. None of it worked. Jesus was gaining converts. "If we let Him go on like this," they cried, "everyone will believe in Him."

"And what's wrong with that," we ask? But you see, it was the devil at work in them. He had tried to kill Jesus through King Herod and had failed. He now tries again through the high priest, Caiaphas, and this time it will work. Because this time is God's time. He, not Satan, has set the wheel in motion. Caiaphas stands up in front of the Pharisees and Sanhedrin. "You know nothing at all," he said, "Don't you realize that it's better for you that one Man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish!" And having said that, they made their plans to kill Jesus.

It made such perfect sense. Save the people by killing just one Man. Who could argue with that logic? It's the stuff heroes are made of. One man dies in order to save all the rest. Samson did it. He rescued the nation of Israel by forfeiting his life as he brought down the house with a crash. Now it's Jesus turn. To save God's people He must be sacrificed. Here's how their thinking went: Judea was a slave nation to Rome. The Romans, not the Jews, were in charge, and Rome did not like it when trouble and turmoil festered and grew within their slave nations. They wanted to keep things peaceful. Jesus was causing too much excitement with all of His miraculous signs and His teaching. Too much excitement could lead to trouble. The Romans might come in with force to calm things down. A lot of people could get hurt in the process. Many may even be killed. So their plan was to kill Jesus first before all of this trouble comes to pass.

Perhaps it made some sense on the surface, but underneath their plan was pure evil. They didn't give one hoot about the people. What they cared about was their place of authority among the people. They were the religious leaders of the Jews. They had cushy jobs. They had positions of honor. They didn't want to lose that. If the Romans came in to settle things down, they would be stripped of what little authority they did have. They would lose their place of honor and leadership among the people.

It wasn't love for the people that motivated them. It was "self-love." Pure selfishness, nothing more, was at the root of their evil plan. And aren't we the same as them. We, too, are motivated by "self-love." And because of our selfishness we become like the Pharisees and Sanhedrin. Because when it comes right down to it—when it's either us or Jesus—Jesus must go.

Oh, we'll fit Jesus into our life when and where it's convenient for us. As long as He doesn't cause trouble. We'll tolerate His words as long as they don't hit us where it hurts. But when He crosses the line; when He interferes with what we really want, then we become just like Caiaphas and the others—time to get rid of Him. He can have some of my Sunday mornings—except when it comes to making money, or getting yard work done, or getting my rest—then what I want to do always wins, and Jesus must go.

He can have some of my money—that which I can spare. But He's not about to get ten percent of my income, or anything close to that. When it's my money or Jesus, my money wins every time. And I'll tolerate His words most of the time. But when I hear something that doesn't agree with what I am—my lifestyle, and what I want, then He's gone too far. How dare He make such claims on me! When it's Him or me, He has to go. Caiaphas' words ring true, as much for us as they did for them.

The best thing to do for us, we think, is to get rid of Jesus; to sacrifice Jesus. And God is in complete agreement. Caiaphas was voicing what God had already determined: Jesus must die so that the people do not perish. It's either us or Jesus. One of us has to suffer hell's punishment. And through the mouth of Caiaphas we hear God's choice: Jesus must die.

God determined that because of our selfish living—Jesus must die. Because of our greed when giving—Jesus must die. Because we choose to live life to fulfill what we want—Jesus must die. Caiaphas was right—somebody had to die. And to save us poor, selfish sinners from eternal death, God's choice is Jesus.

That's the focus of Lent and all of Scripture. We watch Him who had no sin; who knew no selfishness, die the death we sinners deserve. Not to make us feel guilty, but to make us God's children; to wash away our sins in Holy Baptism, and give us there the sure hope of eternal life.

You see, God doesn't know what it means to be selfish. His motivation always is: love for us sinners. He did not selfishly hang on to His place of honor and power, but freely gave it up to come to this lonely place and be crucified. And He did it for us. His thought always is—not, "what's best for Me," but "what's best for My people." And what He saw as being best for you was to die for you; to suffer hell for you; and to come here week after week and give you in His Word and Sacraments what His death gained for you—forgiveness, life, and salvation.

That's what God sees as best for you. And He does what He needs to do, to bring all of His best to you—even when you and I work hard to oppose Him. Look at the good He brought out of Caiaphas' words and their evil, wicked plan. Through their plot to kill Jesus He defeated sin, death, and Satan for all people.

And so in your life—whatever troubles you face; whatever wicked past you bring with you—God brings good out of evil. He who loved you to the point of dying for you, now gives you what is best for you: forgiveness of sins and life eternal in heaven, in His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.