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Sermon Text: Mark 14:66–15:15

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood... to Jesus be the glory... forever and ever! Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Say what?! I can't believe my ears! No way! He actually said that...!? If *'Say what?!'*, is how we react when someone says the opposite of what we might expect, then tonight's Passion Reading is bursting with *'Say what!?'*

First there's Peter. When you read the Gospels, you get the notion that Peter's never been shy. Bold Peter, the Big Fisherman is quick to speak his mind. And time after time, he has spoken of his love, respect and loyalty to Jesus.

He had been exhausted from a night of fishing with nothing to show for it, but when Jesus said try again, Peter replied: **At your word I will let down the nets** (Luke 5:5).

When disciples were deserting Jesus in droves because He had preached the Bread of life sermon in John 6, it was Peter who said the 12 weren't going anywhere. **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God** (John 6:68-69).

But Peter who boldly drew his sword to defend Jesus earlier that night, now cowers at the voice of a **servant girl**, likely a young teenager. The Big Fisherman, so quick to confess of Jesus: **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God** (Matthew 16:6), now turns the air blue with salty vocabulary, **swearing, cursing** up and down that he doesn't even *know* Jesus.

Say what? Peter, the spokesman for the disciples denies Christ is His King.

But in stunning irony, the **chief priests** who have worked so hard to deny any notion that Jesus was the promised Savior King, are now quick to label Him as the **King of the Jews** as they turn Him over to **Pilate**. Um, these guys are not exactly known for their pro-Roman stance, but here they are cozying up to the governor, making like they're so eager to what is best for Caesar, No wonder Pilate sees through their lies and spots their true motive: **envy**.

And remember, *these* are the **chief priests!** The Bible says they're supposed to be **guardians of knowledge...** to **instruct** the people (Malachi 2:7). They should have been the first to recognize Jesus and welcomed Him, praise Him, proclaim Him, not bring baseless accusations against Him!

Then there's **Pontius Pilate**, the Roman **governor**. Talk about *Say What?!* His lips are full of contradictions this day. Through a series of missteps and blunders he ends up sounding

like it was the Jews who had conquered the Romans rather than the other way around, as he, the judge, literally asks the crowd what he should do with Jesus?! To the end, Pilate will maintain Jesus' innocence: **Why? What has he done wrong?** And yet he still speaks the order to send Christ to the cross.

What shocking and unexpected things we hear in this lesson. But it should not really surprise us. Not when we remember all these people were sinners, just like you and I are. Like all people, we enter this world with a corrupt sinful nature that still lives in the hearts of believers, a sinful nature that fights against God's ways, eager to fill our lips and speech with sins right along with our thoughts and actions.

Contradictions, lies and hypocrisy in human speech? No real shocker there, if we remember Jesus said: **What (the) mouth speaks flows from the heart** (Lk 6:45). And in Jeremiah 17, His Word says this about the heart: **The heart is more deceitful than anything. It is beyond cure. Who can understand it?**

And so **Peter's** roller coaster of boldly saying one thing in Church, and then caving into sinful fear and saying and acting the opposite on Monday morning, has been your sin and my sin. The guilt of the **priests** who should know better, lying and stretching the truth (which is lying) to get their way... it's been our guilt. Caving in to go along with the crowd like **Pilate**, letting our words say one thing but our actions do another... we've had those moments too.

Indeed, isn't one of the reasons we so often love to point out hypocrisy and contradiction in others is because then maybe for a moment we can distract ourselves from our own hypocrisy?

Dear friends, through Spirit worked faith, let us rather confess it. Let us repent of the sins of our lips and lives—the things sinful things we said, the helpful words we didn't speak.

And then listen with joy to the greatest *Say What?!* of all! The surprising, shocking things Jesus said to save us!

Ok, in this section of Mark we don't hear Jesus say much at all... but that's exactly the point! First, it's fulfillment of prophecy! 700 years earlier Isaiah wrote: **He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent in front of its shearers, he did not open his mouth.**

Think of the things He could have opened His mouth to say! 'Peter, you don't know me? Fine, let your curses fall upon yourself and let hell swallow you up alive right now.' To the priests He could have said: 'You have tried to darken the Light of God's Word, so depart to eternal darkness you deserve.' To Pilate: 'You who turn justice on its head, let the righteous wrath of God take you now.'

To you and me, He could have said the same. And none of it would have wrong. It would be true. It would be what our sin deserves. It would be right and fully expected.

Instead, to Pilate's amazement, **Jesus still did not answer anything** to all the baseless charges. He will quietly endure an unjust death sentence—without complaint! Why? Because

He chooses to let our guilty sentence fall on Himself, instead of us. Because He chooses to save you and me from the sins of our lips and lives.

As almighty God, He once spoke and all creation came to be. He opened his mouth to calm the storm and drive out demons. But He will not speak or act to save Himself so great is His desire to save us!

When He does open His mouth again it will be to cry out to the Father on the sinners' behalf: **Father forgive them...** Again He cries out from the forsaken pain of hell He bore to set us free. Once more from the cross He will open His mouth to announce that our sin, guilt, punishment for our sinful words and lack of righteous words has been paid in full: **It is finished.**

Three days later with risen and glorified lips He speaks those word the Spirit recorded to assure us of heavenly life and joy: **Peace be with you.**

Still this day, through His word, yes, even through sinful pastors, Jesus Himself declares to those most amazing, eternal life changing, truly undeserved and stunning words: **Your sins are forgiven.**

Yes, you've heard it before. Yes you expect to hear it in this place. But never lose sight of how amazing it is! When Jesus says this, He gives you exactly what He says: **You are forgiven, whoever believe in me is not condemned, I will take you to be where I am.** Amen.

Give thanks to the Lord. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. Amen.