

Preaching Copy: Mark 15:6-15 “Release for Us Barabbas”

Palm Sunday-Sunday of the Passion

Sunday, March 28th, 2021

Text: Mark 15:6-15

⁶ Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. ⁷ And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. ⁸ And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. ⁹ And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. ¹² And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ And they cried out again, "Crucify him." ¹⁴ And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

The text's intent

It's Passover, the festival that celebrates God freeing His people from captivity. They did not deserve it but were freed nonetheless by the LORD who loved them as they were. Barabbas, one guilty of murder and deserving crucifixion, will be set free, because an innocent man will take his place. The man who is also God, who had the power and the right to stop this travesty of justice but did not. This was the hour of the power of darkness, and Jesus is submitting to its evil plans, because they will fulfill the gracious and merciful plan of salvation of God Himself. This is what this true King of the Jews and of all nations rode into Jerusalem to accomplish, to free all men from captivity to sin, eternal death, and the devil. He is fulfilling His prophesied destiny to be the Passover Lamb of sacrifice whose suffering and death will be the power to free Jew and Roman alike, as well as the whole world, from the punishment each and every person earns and deserves. Jesus not only took Barabbas' place in death, but He also took my place.

Focus Statement:

Jesus is the Savior King who rode into Jerusalem to save us from all that we earn and deserve as insurrectionists who refuse His rule and attack one another out of jealousy. He submitted to the powers of darkness because they were unwittingly fulfilling the Father's salvation plan. He the innocent man allowed Himself to be charged, tortured, and executed out of the greatest kind of love, the sacrificial and unselfish love He has for me, and by faith shares with me.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We are Barabbas: the ones guilty of insurrection against the LORD who rules all, yet we get to go free. We are the crowd, who at times love Jesus to be our Savior but refuse Him to be our Lord when His commands counter the desires of our sinful hearts. We are the chief priests who become enraged when others steal our attention and our thunder-making us look bad.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Experience the conviction of seeing ourselves represented in the participants of this Passion Drama. Be uplifted and absolved by the love Jesus demonstrates suffering all this not because He had to, but because He desires so greatly that I be saved from the fate I deserve.

Subject Sentence: Jesus suffers and dies, we the guilty go free.

Introduction: Bird's Eye View of Passion Week

This Sunday that begins Holy Week is often called "Palm Sunday", because it begins with echoing the cry of the Passover pilgrims 2000 plus years ago. We wave palm fronds and chant "Hosanna!" a word which comes from the Hebrew word meaning "Save us now". In Old Testament context it was a prayerful cry to the LORD by His people who were suffering the affliction brought on by other empires ruling over them. But in our Gospel reading from John it's really a cry of excitement and joy by those who see in Jesus coming into Jerusalem God's answer to their prayers. Here before them, riding in on a donkey, fulfilling Scripture, is the One for whom they have waited so very long! They cry out quoting Old Testament prophetic Scripture **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD, even the King of Israel! (John 12:13)**. They are confessing that Jesus is their Savior King, prophesied long ago, the One from the line of David who would come to save them with the power and authority of God. And it being Passover they are remembering just how God used Moses so long ago. Through Him as mediator God rescued their ancestors from captivity in Egypt. This is what the celebration of Passover was all about. And here before them was the new Moses, the Savior King, the fulfillment of God's promised plan of salvation. And they believe He has come to do exactly as they desire of Him by freeing them from captivity to the Romans.

The whole city is behind Him, except for the chief priests, the Jewish Ruling Council, and the Pharisees, who had been trying to show Him to be a false prophet, a false Messiah. But so far, they have failed miserably. They admit this much in **John 12:19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."** If this was as far as we went into the story of Passion week then Palm Sunday would be a fine name for worship today.

But the joyous celebration that marked our opening of this service is not where our focus stays. This Sunday is more accurately called "Passion Sunday". We look at Jesus' entrance into the city to contrast it with what will happen five days later. Because what happens five days later reveals to us the real reason this King of the Jews, who is in all actuality King of the whole world, came to Jerusalem. It explains the real reason the man, who is God the Son in the flesh, entered into His creation to be born a human being. He has come to be a conquering King, but not in the way they at that time, nor our culture even now sees Him.

The Symbolism and Irony of Jesus before Pilate

Throughout our Midweek Lenten journey we've focused on what Jesus experienced on Thursday night, and leading into Friday morning: His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, His betrayal by one of His own in the Garden, His arrest and being taken first to Caiaphas, the high priest where He was investigated and tried before the Jewish Ruling Council, and then taken to Pilate, who took Him into custody to see if He had broken any Roman laws. Throughout this we see Jesus' disciples who promised to stand by His side fall farther and

farther away from Him, with Peter actually denying he had any part of being Jesus' follower. Throughout all this time we see who is really in control; it's Jesus. In the Garden at His arrest, Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away, for now is the time when the powers of darkness will have their way. But Jesus shows who remains in control when He asks the crowd who they have come for. The Roman soldier in charge responds, "Jesus of Nazareth." To this Jesus replies using His Divine name by which He has been worshiped by His people of old: "I AM He". The Roman soldiers, temple guards, and the rest of the crowd all fall backwards. They are facing the LORD God in the flesh, and He remains in control, willingly submitting to all things, willingly giving Himself over to the powers of darkness.

These soldiers march Him off to the high priest who is Caiaphas, before whom Jesus gives the good confession: **(Mark 14:61-62) ⁶¹ Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" ⁶² And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."** For Caiaphas and the men of the Jewish Ruling Council, this was Jesus confessing not only to being the promised Messiah, but equal to God the Father. For them He has just sealed His fate. They cannot and will not believe this about Him. They march Him off to Pilate to seek the death penalty for Him. Yet He is still in control, and it's all part of the Father's plan.

Jesus is then questioned by Pilate. He confesses to Pilate that the Jewish Council's charges of Him claiming to be a king are true in a sense. Jesus tells Pilate that He is indeed a king, but that His kingdom is not presently of this world. Pilate doesn't quite understand what it means that His kingdom is not of this world, but what he does garner from it is that Jesus poses no threat to Roman rule. As Jesus points out He has no armed force that fought to prevent His capture. What kind of a threat is an alleged king without an army to defend him? Pilate concludes that Jesus is not guilty of breaking any Roman laws.

Knowing he has before Him an innocent man; Pilate uses the means available to him to try to set Him free. As a governor who knows a thing or two about how to rule over these uncooperative people, he has a very wise tradition. He has had experience with these Jews during their Passover festival. He may not know all the details about what they celebrate, but he knows that this celebration emboldens some to insurrection and murder against Roman rule. He has several guilty of such a thing who are currently bound in prison. So he heads out to offer to the gathered crowd an olive branch: they can ask for one particular prisoner's freedom, and if it meets his approval, he will grant it. But this year he suggests a name for them: the "King of the Jews."

Now Pilate knows the reason why the chief priests brought Jesus to him. He knows that the charges against Him of fomenting insurrection are lies. He knows enough about these chief priests that the real reason is not really about the Jewish religious beliefs. It is jealousy, it is envy. And they are truly jealous. They are envious of His popularity and influence among the common people. Jealous of how everyone went after Him five days ago on Sunday. Jealous of how the people have been listening to Him teach in the temple. Jealous and irate

at how the people enjoy seeing Him put them, the true leaders of the Jewish faith, in their place. Jealousy and envy have been stewing in their hearts, and it has boiled over into the murderous desire to see Him crucified.

In what unfolds here before Pilate is a great irony. Jesus, the innocent, the one the crowd joyously welcomed 5 days earlier, is the one they should demand to go free. But instead, they cry out for the release of a convicted murderer. Why would they do this? Part of the reason we are told is because the chief priests stirred up the crowd. But that's not the only reason. The crowd that welcomed Him five days earlier expected Him to save them from Roman rule. And He has not done so. Even worse He is now a prisoner of Rome. They are disillusioned with Him. They see Him as just an empty promise, just like all those other wanna be Messiah's and insurrectionists that have come before Him. He deserves to die just as they have. All this because He refused to be the Messiah that they wanted Him to be.

How We Should See Ourselves and Jesus in this Drama

Now before we condemn the players in this drama, we should take a closer look at how we fit into it. For you and I are represented here too. You and I are those who openly welcome Jesus to come and be our Savior. Except we often desire Him to be the Savior we want Him to be: a Savior who is not necessarily our Lord. We want Him to keep excusing our sinful disobedience without actually requiring us to change. We want to keep on living to please our own sinful hearts while Jesus does His job of covering up our sins. And after all, we don't commit the really big sins that would make us awful people: we don't murder, we don't steal money from a bank, we don't cheat on our spouse, we give our offering. Hey, we're pretty much obedient. Except for those certain things, those that we don't like to talk about. Except for those things we don't always recognize as sins. After all, they're not really that bad. Everybody does them. We know deep down they're wrong. We know we are supposed to love one another and even love our enemies. But c'mon Lord, isn't that a little too much to ask? Who can really do that after all? Just keep forgiving us Jesus, give us that free pass. We'll be happy with you just as long as you're the Savior we want you to be. Yes, you and I are a lot like that fickle crowd that only liked Jesus when He did what they wanted Him to do.

But Jesus came into this world as a King. He rode into Jerusalem and they called Him the King of the Jews, and He truly was that. But in reality, He is far more; He is the King of all Creation. He is the Word who spoke all things into existence. He commands that we love Him and love one another. We are willing to love those who love us, but when someone makes us angry, or jealous, all bets are off. In our hearts at times, we secretly want to see some of the righteous wrath of God fall down on those who hurt us and do wrong against us. But you know what our LORD calls that? Insurrection! Whenever we disobey any of the LORD's commandments, we are in rebellion against our one and only King. He created us. He has the right to proclaim to us how life is to be lived. We daily and in more ways than we realize rebel against His laws and commands. Who are we in this drama? In our jealousy

and anger against our enemies we are like the chief priests. In our sinful disobedience we are like Barabbas. We are sinners deserving of the most horrible death known, crucifixion.

But just as Jesus is the one who will take Barabbas place, and be crucified so Barabbas can go free, He came to do the same thing for you and for me. We are the prisoners bound in our own sinful disobedience. But Jesus came and took the chains off of us and wrapped them around Himself. He allowed Himself to be bound, to be punched and slapped, to be spit upon, to be mocked, to be tied to a post and whipped until bloody and raw. He willingly took His place on the cross and died for you, so that you, like Barabbas might go free.

And He did all this not with anger in His heart over all you and I made Him suffer. What moved Him throughout His passion was love. What kept Him affixed to the cross was not nails, but love. What moved Him to give His life for you, was the greatest love anyone can ever know. It's the love of God. The love that moved Him to create human beings knowing that they would rebel and sin against Him. The love that committed Him from the beginning to one day enter His creation as a man in order to save us from eternal separation. It's the love that can't stand the thought of you being separated from Him forever. It's the love of Jesus Christ, and it's His free gift to you in the Gospel Message.

It's the love being sung about in our Sermon Anthem, "**Amazing Love**" "***My Lord what love is this, that pays so dearly? That I, the guilty one, may go free! And so, they watched Him die. Despised, rejected. But oh, the blood He shed, flowed for me. Amazing love! Oh what sacrifice! The Son of God, given for me! My debt He pays, and my death He dies, that I might live!***" It is a love that brings me to my knees, that humbles me in its strength, because I know it's not natural in my heart.

But it's a love that lifts me up and heals all the brokenness within. Because it's a love that my Savior and King shares willingly and abundantly with me. (From "**Amazing Love**") "***And now this love of Christ, shall flow like rivers! Come wash your guilt away, Live again!***" This love was poured into your life and my life in our Baptism. And Jesus continues to pour it out upon you here in this worship service, in His Word read, sung, and proclaimed in this very sermon. He gives it to you with the bread and the wine by His real presence. He shouts out His love for you from the empty tomb, assuring you that just as He rose from the dead you will too. It comes to you with His gift of faith. It's priceless. And it's yours.

Conclusion

During this coming week, as we focus on the final days of Jesus earthly ministry, keep His wonderful gift of love in mind. As we study the night He was betrayed and see Him institute The Lord's Supper, see it as His gift of love for you. As we meditate on His suffering and death that is Good Friday, as awful as it is, see it as His gift of love for you. And in His resurrection, hold fast to the wonderful promise that awaits all of us who have been called to live in His love now, and into eternity, where we will live immersed in that love body and soul. Jesus came on that first Palm Sunday to be our Savior King, but in a manner that we don't fully comprehend. May this coming week give you pause to reflect on His coming, be uplifted by it, and rejoice in Christ's Amazing Love, along with all the gifts that He brings to you. Amen.