



In the Shadow of the Cross What Would You Do For Freedom?

Mark 15: 6-15

So, many times when faced with a decision we want to wait on God, we want to trust God's word to be true and right, we want to be patient and faithful. However, then there grows within our minds a thought, it begins as a murmur, well this one time, it grows into a audible voice, it is the easiest way forward, then we hear it shouting to us, as we choose to do it our own way and not the way of Jesus.... give us Barabbas!

The story of Barabbas reminds us that we daily face the choice of following the Barabbas way or the way of Jesus. Here is the hard part. Just like the crowd was choosing between two Jesus'... our choices are sometimes difficult. It might seem at the time it really does not matter which way we choose, but the truth is it makes all the difference in the world. Thus, we must always do our best to truly follow God's word and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

One last thought from our story today. As we stand in the shadow of the cross, we are reminded that in a very real way... the story of Barabbas has come to remind us that we are all Barabbas. We all stand condemned. We might say I am not a murderer or a rebel. I am no assassin. That is true but Barabbas biggest failing is that he did not trust God's plan, but rather trusted his own way. That, my friend... is the essence of sin. We choose our way and not Gods' way and so we sin against God and we stand condemned.

We stand in the shadow of the cross, condemned men and women in our sins. We have known prospect for freedom and release. Our days are numbered. Yet, in this moment, God looks down and when it comes to God's choice...God chooses Jesus. When He could have brought judgment on us, God out of love for us, out of unmeasured mercy and grace... chooses Jesus in our place.

Just like the crowd chose Jesus and Barabbas was set free... God chooses Jesus and we are set free. Yet, unlike Barabbas, some of us are still walking around like we are prisoners. Some of us have been set free, but we still want to wear our shackles and chains. We have been set free, but we are still wearing our prison clothes. We are set free, but you would never

know it by the way we live and the shame and guilt we deal with and even worse, the pride and arrogance we have about our sinful ways.

What would you do for freedom? What would you do to be free from the consequence of yours sins once and for all? All you have to do is make a choice. Just like that day there was a choice between Barabbas, what I can do and Jesus, what God is doing... we have a choice. Choose Jesus.

In the morning when I rise- Give me Jesus- Lord help me to choose your way every day.

When I am alone- Give me Jesus- When people are watching and when know one is watching let me be pleasing to you.

When I come to die- Give me Jesus- Lord I live my life to you and I die unto you so whether living or dying, I live unto you. Give me Jesus.

When the world cries, "give us Barabbas!" In the shadow of the cross we cry, "give me Jesus."



TRINITY PULPIT



Maybe it started as a soft murmur or maybe it was with one loud voice, but the result is the same in all four gospels. When Pilate asks whom he should release to the people during Passover they cried, "give us Barabbas." Jesus had been falsely accused and arrested. He had been before the Sanhedrin and they had found Him guilty of heresy saying He was the Son of God. They had bound Him and took Him to Pilate who, when he heard their charges, knew that they were simply acting out of jealousy. Pilate essentially thought that this was about a lot of nothing. A religious squabble not worthy of Rome's interest. According to only Luke... when Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean, he sends Him to Herod thinking he, as a Jew would know what to do with this Jesus and this religious matter. We are told that when Jesus comes to Herod, Herod is overjoyed because he had wanted to meet Jesus. Herod had heard about Jesus and wanted Jesus to perform a miracle. In other words, Herod wanted to be entertained by Jesus. Jesus was a novelty and an interesting figure. When Herod doesn't hear a reply from Jesus, he has Jesus dressed up as a king and mocks Him and then sends Him back to Pilate. Herod wanted a miracle, a trick or some form of entertainment from Him. However, when Jesus did not turn out to be whom he thought or wanted Jesus to be, he had no use for Him.

It seemed that it was the normal practice of the governor in Jerusalem to release to the people one prisoner during the Passover Feast. It is not clear if this was a Roman custom or it was a Jewish custom. It was probably an act by the government to show benevolence. It was in essence a publicity stunt. As a ruling foreign government, they could show their mercy in a moment where the people had filled Jerusalem in a religious fever pitch. Some suggest it had something

to do with the practice of Jubilee, which was really never fulfilled by the Jewish people.

Whatever the reason might have been there was a custom, a habit to release one prisoner at the time of Passover to the people. In Mark's gospel, it was the crowd who came to Pilate and reminded him to do what he usually did during Passover. In the other gospels, it seems to be more of Pilate's idea as a way of passing the buck of his responsibility toward Jesus.

If we take the varied accounts of the gospels of Pilate's choices he gave the people of who should be released, whom then should he release? Barabbas or Jesus, the one they called the Christ?

Did it start with a mummer? Did it start quietly with a few voices calling out? Mark tells us that leaders and the priests had convinced the crowd to call for Barabbas. In other words, it was a conspiracy from the beginning to the end. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were determined to silence Him. They had been plotting to kill Jesus and now they were just a few steps away. It seems while there were those working on those in power, there were others working on the minds of the people. While there were those working at the place of power and decision-making, there were also those who were coloring public opinion and the demand of the masses. It was a well laid out plan. They had found the one insider who could be influenced in Judas. They had chosen a time that was always ripe with nationalistic uprising... the Passover. They played every participant perfectly. From those in the highest office to the pilgrims on the streets.

When Pilate asked, "Whom shall I release?" They cried back, "Barabbas. Give us Barabbas." Then Pilate asked "What then shall I do with this man, speaking



of Jesus?" They replied, "Crucify Him." Pilate asked the question, "For what? What crime has He committed?" Yet they shouted back, "Crucify Him." Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas and had Jesus flogged and handed Him over to be crucified.

Barabbas is an enigmatic character in the scripture. He is obviously a history figure. He appears in all of the accounts of the gospels. Just who is this prisoner set free in the place of Jesus? Just whom did they choose that day when they had the choice of Jesus and Barabbas?

The gospels give us some insight into who this man was. There are various ways he is described. Matthew describes him as notorious prisoner. In other words, he was well known. He was not a common thief or hooligan. Barabbas had a following. Barabbas was of interest. So much so that the religious leaders knew who he was, as did the people on the street. As much as Jesus' reputation had been growing by the time he arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover, so had the reputation of Barabbas.

Luke tells us that Barabbas was in prison for an insurrection or a riot and for murder. It begs the question who had he murdered? Did he murder other Jewish people or had he murdered Roman in this insurrection? It would seem if he were murderer, he was definitely in prison awaiting capital punishment. He was there to die.

John tells us that Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion. So now we are getting a clearer picture of Barabbas. He was not a robber on the highway. He was not a murderer who had killed someone over nothing. He was part of a movement. He had been part of a riot, which was a rebellion against the government and status quo.

Mark, normally our most succinct gospel, is actually the most descriptive of Barabbas. Mark tells us that Barabbas is in prison with the insurrectionists. There were many. They had committed murder in the uprising. The uprising is an interesting term. The way Mark writes those words indicates that his readers would know exactly what riot, what insurrection and what uprising he was referring too. The others said rebellion or riot, but Mark says the uprising. It is an historical moment that was fresh in their minds when Mark writes these words.

In Judea there had been many uprisings and rebellions during the life of Jesus. Judas the Galilean had led a revolt in 6 A.D. during a census. In the

20 years between this revolt and Pilate coming to power in 26 A.D. there had been many skirmishes, rebellions and uprisings. There were essentially three participants in the uprisings. There were the Zealots, who were more of a political party, who were working toward an independent nation. There were the bandits who would just terrorize the highways. There were Sicarii. The Sicarii were known as dagger carriers. They were always armed and looking for ways to cause political havoc. They were assassins. Carrying their daggers they looked for opportunities to kill those in power. It is thought that Barabbas may have been such a person. He was participating in the uprising. It could be Mark uses this term to describe an ongoing rebellion against Rome.

Which brings us to the most interesting aspect of the man Barabbas, and that is his name. His name means "son of the Father." Literally, son of Abba. Jesus had taught his disciples to pray to God as Abba father. However, there are several early texts of Matthew that suggest that this was not his full name. In fact, there are several texts that suggest that Barabbas real name was Jesus Barabbas. It has been suggested that the text was changed as not to relate Jesus name to a name of an assassin. Thus, the KJV and other translations have had Barabbas and Jesus. There is no confusing the two.

However, what really was presented that day was much more significant. Pilate stood before the crowd and said whom should I release to you? Do you want Jesus Barabbas? Do you want Jesus the one who you call the Messiah or the Christ? Here are two saviors with the same name. One uses power, terror, murder, havoc, and upheaval. The other speaks of love, turning the cheek, peace and a kingdom not of this world. One speaks of independence and the other speaks of dependence upon God. One takes matters into their own hands and the other releases all into the hands of God. The choice could not have been starker. Which one do you want? Do you want Jesus Barabbas or do you want Jesus the Christ?

They cried give us Barabbas? When Pilate tries to reason the response is all the more they cry give us Barabbas.

In William Barclay's commentary on Mark, he remarks the moment the world has been choosing Barabbas and not Jesus. He notes three ways our world always chooses the way of Barabbas and not the way of Jesus. Barclay writes our world chooses lawlessness over the law. One of the words for sin is lawlessness. It is the sense of no discipline and

doing whatever one wants to do with no regards or consequences for others. I will do as I please and I don't care who gets hurt or who dies in Barabbas case. It is the spirit within us all that wants no boundaries and no discipline. I will do what I desire no matter what that might be. Give us Barabbas is the cry of lawlessness.

Give us Barabbas is the cry of war and peace. They chose a man of blood and not a man of peace. In three thousand years of history Barclay writes, there have been less than 130 years of a time where there was not war raging somewhere. Barabbas is something that our world understands. We understand power, claiming our own, and fighting for it.

The statement "Give us Barabbas" says Barclay, also reminds us that the world chooses violence over love. When they cried give us Barabbas, they chose violence to others over loving others. In Barabbas they found a man who would fight for them and would hate their enemies as much as they did. No time for a man who said love and pray for your enemies. Everyone knows the only way to rid your self of an enemy is to eliminate them and that requires violence, not love. They chose violence and not love. They chose revenge and not forgiveness when they cried Barabbas.

I think Barclay is right in his assessment, but I think the choice between the way of Barabbas and the way of Jesus is even more personal. I think it is more of a way of looking at life. I think we all cry give me Barabbas.

We cry give us Barabbas when we choose that which is popular, instead of right. One scholar said, that which is the popular choice is often the wrong choice. What happened that day was that it was popular to cry for Barabbas. If you shouted Barabbas you were pleasing to those around you and you were pleasing to those in power. To cry out Jesus that day would have been unpopular. In fact, to cry Jesus in that moment might have gotten you a beaten.

It was easier that day to go along with the crowd. Let's admit it, it is easy to go along with the crowd. This happens in our culture personally and corporately. This can be a personal decision with friends, co-

workers and even in family. We can choose just not to raise our voice, speak up, or choose a different act. How hard it is to go against the crowd and what is popular?

Choosing Jesus has never really been popular. You might say what about when our culture was more of a church culture? What about when the church and state were one and the same in our nation and in other nations? You see, we confuse church going and church popularity with Jesus. Following the way of Jesus has never been popular. Choosing to follow Jesus has always required one to walk in the narrow way and not in the way that is wide that leads to destruction. The way that leads to destruction

WHEN WE LIVE UNDISCIPLINED LIVES AND GET CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENT OF PASSION, WE CAN QUICKLY DO WHAT WE WOULD NEVER DO IN GOOD JUDGMENT.

is wide and many walk in it because it is popular. The way of salvation is narrow and few find it. Those are the words of Jesus.

We cry Barabbas when we would rather not go against the crowd for the sake of following Jesus.

We cry Barabbas when we react out of passion and not

out of judgment. The crowd was stirred up. They got caught up in the moment. Many of them may have regretted their participation that day. When they got home they may have thought why did I do this. They may have had regrets of the passion of the moment. When we live undisciplined lives and get caught up in the moment of passion, we can quickly do what we would never do in good judgment.

How many marriages have been destroyed by actions in a moment of passion and desire and not a moment of discipline and judgment? How many relationships have been ruined with words spoke in the passion of the moment and not with a tamed tongue? How many reputations have been compromised for a decision made in haste instead of sound judgment?

Even subtler are those moments we choose what we know over the mystery of following Jesus. How tempting it is to do what is expedient, instead of waiting on God. In the moment of Barabbas and Jesus, Barabbas represents what we know works, violence, power, force and Jesus represents that which we are not sure about love, peace, and forgiveness. Barabbas represents that which is obvious and Jesus represents a plan that only God knows and it is yet to be revealed to us.