

Connect & Reflect

Wednesday, 11/13/19

SERMON SUMMARY

Which one do you want?

Matthew 27:15-23

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" (Matthew 27:15-23, ESV).

In recent Sundays, we looked at Jesus' predictions concerning his crucifixion, and then how he took the Passover meal and reinterpreted it for the apostles (and for the church). On Sunday we reflected on a part of one of his trials that began early on that fateful Friday morning.

The religious leaders had brought him before Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea, whose primary goal was to keep the locals peaceful and relatively happy so that his somewhat shaky political position wouldn't be endangered by reports of unrest. Recognizing that Jesus had been brought to him because of envy among the religious elites, he thought that he might release Jesus—whom he knew to be innocent—according to a custom where he released a prisoner of the people's choice during the weekend of Passover.

He had in custody an insurrectionist named Barabbas, and he thought the people would want this violent man to remain in prison, but he misjudged them. When he asked them if they wanted Barabbas or Jesus to be freed, they asked for Barabbas. There's an interesting spiritual point here. Pilate's question, "Which of the two do you want?", can be read as the kind of question that we all must answer. Do you want Barabbas, the one who offers the best short-term outcome? After all, Barabbas probably had as his goal the liberation of the Jewish people from Roman oppression—something that was very important to them.

Or do you want Jesus, the one whose counter-intuitive kingdom ethic would likely bring about short-term struggle? Which one do you want? Do you want the one who does what you want or the one who does what you need? Do you want the strong-and-powerful Barabbas or the meek-and-mild Jesus? Do you want the one who leads guerrilla warfare, or the one who washes feet?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Start Praying

- 1) How can our class pray for you, a friend, or loved one tonight?

Start Reading (read Matthew 27:15-23)

- 2) What questions come to mind as you read this text? What's one thing that you remember from the sermon?

Start Thinking

- 3) There's pretty good evidence that Barabbas' name was actually Jesus Barabbas, which makes verse 17 interesting. How might Pilate have been making a play on words in his request?
- 4) Read Matthew 21:1-11, which took place on the [Palm] Sunday prior to Jesus' crucifixion. Contrast this reaction with the crowd's words in Matthew 27. Why is there such a stark difference?
- 5) How do you interpret Pilate's words and actions in our text? What do you think is motivating him?
- 6) How is Jesus Christ's kingdom different from the one that Barabbas and the religious leaders were pursuing?
- 7) In Jesus' trial, the guilty one (Barabbas) was set free, while the innocent one (Jesus) was sentenced to die. How does this in a sense reflect the gospel?

Start Sharing

- 8) Which do you choose—Jesus Barabbas ("son of a father"), or Jesus the Christ (son of God)? How is this choice the same one that every person must make when presented with Jesus Christ?
- 9) How is choosing Barabbas more appealing?
- 10) Think about the religious leaders. They had seen many of Jesus' marvelous works, but still wanted to kill him. Why? What was wrong in their hearts? Does this happen to us? If so, how?

Start Doing

- 11) How should our lives reflect that we are disciples of Jesus, a man of peace, rather than Barabbas, a man of violence?
- 12) How does following Jesus require us to focus on long-term outcomes rather than short-term consequences?