

We've been going through the life of Jesus through the Gospel of Mark, and we're approaching the end. This is one of two more sermons, after which we'll conclude our study in the Gospel of Mark. Things are progressing in a way where we come to both familiar yet weighty texts.

There's a sense now where we're moving through the life of Jesus. The cross is now fully in view. In the context of the story, we're just a few mere hours from Jesus going to the cross. So there's a sense in which everything, all these ends that Mark has been drawing, are starting to culminate and find their location in Jesus hanging on the cross. And there's a sense where Mark wants us to lean in.

If you remember, way back at the beginning of this series, I mentioned how Mark writes in such a way that he moves really fast. He's action-packed. It's one event to the next and the next. Often, he would use phrases like, immediately Jesus went here; suddenly, this took place. But yet Mark, when he gets to the very last week of Jesus' life, slows way down. We spend the back half of Mark on the last week of Jesus' life, where he wants us to really pay attention to what's happening in these particular hours. So when we come to a text like this, we come again with the cross in full view.

It's become a sort of familiar symbol to us, hasn't it? Most of us have become so familiar with the cross that it's actually lost its edge. You know, if you were in the first century and you found someone who was wearing a cross as jewelry, that would have been very startling to you. It would have been a radically kind of misplaced assumption. Now, it's not bad to do that, and that's not the point of the comment I'm making. But it's rather that we have lost exactly what the cross was in its original context. In the first century, if you were to wear a cross around your neck, it would be something more akin to us wearing an electric chair around our neck. The cross was a means, a tool of execution. It was a violent symbol; it was a symbol that represented the power and the might of an empire like Rome. It was something that was quite haunting. It was invented by the Romans in such a way as to put people in their place when they try to cross the power of Rome. It was used as a spectacle to help people understand when you cross us, this is what happens.

Jesus, as a boy growing up in Galilee, knew this full well. He was not the first to be crucified, nor would he be the last. Rather, as a boy, Jesus would have watched thousands of people across Galilee be crucified at the hands of the Roman Empire. There was, as we see in this text, an uprising that Barabbas seemed to be involved with. There was this crew that wanted to overthrow the very powers of Rome, and they paid the price for that. So Jesus was familiar with this.

This symbol of the cross was unavoidably a political symbol. Before, it was a religious symbol; before it had theological meaning, it was a

political symbol. Pilate knew that. Jesus knew that. Jesus' followers knew that. It was a symbol that essentially said that Rome was in charge, and this is what happens when you try to cross Rome. It's a powerful moment. And it's unavoidable at this point that Jesus is reaching this culmination with this fully in view.

I've entitled this sermon "When God Became King" because the climax of the whole story of the gospels that we see in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is the inauguration of Jesus, the King. That's the gospels' fundamental purpose. It's the fulfillment of the entire story of Israel. If you remember, God says, "We will set aside a people, the Israelites, who I will bless so that they can be a blessing to all the other nations." The Old Testament is about Israel trying to figure out how to exist as God's people. And at one point, they're like, you know, we just need a king like all the other nations. In a sort of act of apostasy, they rebel against God and say, God, can't we just be like all the other nations? And they completely lost the plot.

That was never the intention. They weren't to be like every other nation. They were to be distinct and different. And God warns them and tells them that they don't really want a king like all the other nations. They needed a different kind of king, one that they would call the Messiah, the *Christos*, the Christ. He said that he would send that king, but it would look radically different.

So when we get to the gospels, what we see is Jesus is the fulfillment of all that's been happening in the Old Testament. As they wrestled with king after king and judge after judge, all failing along the way, it's been pointing and culminating in this sermon and the next sermon in which Jesus is inaugurated as the very king of the universe on earth as it is in heaven.

And it's this moment that we lean in, but yet at the same time, when we see Jesus raised up on that cross in that moment in which he is brought to kingship, it's radically different than we could ever imagine. And no one at this moment thinks that Jesus is being inaugurated as king. As you'll see, the Roman officials mock him with such a paradox that when they say, Hail King of the Jews, they don't realize they're proclaiming the truth more than they understood. They are, in fact, hailing him as king, but no one saw a king, a God who would die. No one tells that story. That is a radically different understanding.

But again, the purpose is that when we watch Jesus in this moment ascend to the cross, we are watching the very coronation of our king in a way that we would never anticipate, a way that tells a different story than, from my understanding, every religion in the world. The idea that God would die is radically new in the history of the cosmos. So, as we approach this, we see Jesus was confronted by the religious

establishment. Remember, he was before the Sanhedrin, put on trial, falsely accused, all these sorts of things, as the religious leaders were trying to squelch this Jesus and trying to put down this Jesus movement. And so they made these accusations. "Are you the Messiah?" And Jesus says, "Yes, I am, as you say, and yet that infuriates them." They respond with this vitriol, but they're caught between a rock and a hard place because they actually don't have the power to execute Jesus. This is why they bring him to Pilate.

What we see in this scene is not Jesus before the religious establishment, but we see Jesus before the political establishment. In some ways, it's the two-headed kind of powers of the world at the time, the religious and the political. And Jesus will step confidently into both and will take the accusations against him and lay his life down on their behalf. But when Jesus was resurrected, it upended these kinds of kingdoms, and we have a radically new kingdom to which we are gathered here today to continue to celebrate.

There was something about this kingdom that we stand very much in the wake of. Jesus knew something about this because, again, Rome is no longer the world's superpower. It is no longer there. It's really largely a beautiful city, but it's nothing more than that. But the kingdom of God has spread from every corner of the earth. It has spread around the world where millions of people around the globe are gathered like you and me today to celebrate this King Jesus. This is a king that shatters all of our expectations of him. It shatters all our expectations of what it means to live and be in this world.

So, this morning, I want to unpack three meanings of this text. The first is the political. It's inescapable that this moment is a political moment. The second is theological. What does this tell us about God? What do we understand about the very character of God? And then lastly, I want to unpack the personal meaning because this text is deeply personal in ways that I think some of us can see or get hints of, but it's profound when we get to that point.

As we go through this text, I want us to think of all this that Mark has been drawing together for fourteen chapters until we arrive here. *"Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate."* (Mark 15:1).

As I just mentioned, they didn't have the authority to actually execute someone, so they had to get in cahoots with the state and gather all of their leaders, bring them before Pilate, and try to make Pilate do their bidding because they couldn't really do anything at this point. They merged this kind of church and state, which historically, up until the first century, was very common. The church and the state were always sort of intertwined. Often, pagan religions would spur up out of that. You certainly see that in Rome, in which Caesar himself would claim to be the son of God. He would claim to be the very one who would bring the prince of peace. So these symbols often overlapped, but now you see Israel's religious leaders doing the same thing.

The question we have to ask then is, who is Pilate? Who is this character? Well, Pilate was a Roman prefect or governor. His main task was to rule

his area of Rome's empire in a way that kept the peace and would, in turn, expand the might and power of Rome. Pilate, at the time, probably lived about 60 miles away in Caesarea, where he had a very comfortable living. He had done well for himself as someone who worked for the empire. So the question is why then is he in Israel? Why is he here at this particular moment? Well, remember, the feast is going on, and there would have been hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people descending on the city.

This is a moment that's ripe for an uprising; it's ripe for insurrection; it's ripe for the overthrow of Rome. He would travel into the city in order to tamp down all of that to essentially assert Rome's authority and power. He's there to suppress that, to keep his assertion and his position of power and wealth in play. The religious leaders knew this, so they thought that this was a pretty good opportunity. Let's go talk to Pilate and see if he could do the work for them. They bring Jesus before Pilate.

**"Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "You have said so," Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. vv. 2-5**

The first question Pilate asks when he sees Jesus is, "Are you king of the Jews?" Note that this is not a political question he is asking, nor is he concerned about the theological question. Are you the Christ? That's what the religious leaders asked. But here, Pilate, a political figure, is worried about someone taking his position of power. So he says, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Are you in any way a threat to my power and my position? And Jesus' response is fascinating.

Take note that these are the only words we see Jesus say in this entire text, which is a bit stunning, given what plays out. But Jesus responds, "You have said so," which isn't quite a full-throated yes or no. He's essentially saying your words, not mine. Are you the king of the Jews? A more literal translation that scholars attempt in this enigmatic phrase is that it's almost like Jesus is saying the words are yours. It's his way of breathing some ambiguity into it, but it's an intentional ambiguity. One scholar notes that his coyness in this response was intentional because he wanted to be intentionally noncommittal.

Think about the other time in scripture, in Mark 12, when Jesus is confronted with the political establishment, and those religious leaders come and say, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar?" You remember Jesus' answer. It was also quite coy. He says, give to Caesar what's Caesar's, give to God what's God's. Jesus, when he's confronted with the political establishment, plays very coy with it. Not a full-throated no, not a full-throated yes. Are you the king of the Jews? So, what's Jesus getting at?

I think what he's getting at here is this sense that the very categories we place on Jesus, that Pilate is trying to understand this Jesus. Remember, he's worried about Jesus being a threat, so he's placing his political categories on Jesus. And Jesus just says that I am, but I'm not like you; I don't play by your games. I don't play by your means. You don't know; you don't understand exactly what is meant by this idea of the King of

the Jews. Yes, on one hand, I am, but no in the sense that you're interpreting me as King of the Jews.

It's this very tricky, ambiguous response, but again, don't forget that Jesus is intentional with this. The chief priests, well after hearing Jesus say this in verse 3, accused him of many things. They begin to heap false accusations at Jesus. We don't know the nature of those particular ones, but I would guess it's similar to what they had accused him of just hours earlier in the Sanhedrin.

Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer?" He's looking at Jesus, hearing these accusations thrown at him, and Jesus continues to remain silent. Pilate asks, "Aren't you going to do anything or say anything to this?" And it says that Jesus remained silent; he made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

The word amazed has the connotation of a positive, not negative. It's not like, "You're an idiot. Why aren't you responding?" It's not that Pilate is literally amazed at Jesus sitting there taking these accusations and not responding in kind. He's blown away. He's beginning to figure out that this is a different kind of person. This person doesn't function the way the other rebels that he had encountered acted like. This Jesus is remaining silent before his accusers. He's not responding. He's not playing the games of the Roman Empire, and Pilate is amazed. Well, the scene goes on.

**Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. vv. 6-8**

The scene zooms out now a little bit from the intimate scene of Jesus before Pilate, and we're introduced to the crowd that's there. Mark has been very intentional about this idea of the crowd. It has been a character in his gospel. It's not just a nebulous group. Rather, there was the crowd, there were the disciples, and then there was Jesus. The disciples were emblematic of those who came out of the crowd to follow Jesus, and the crowd was that group that was, at times, watching, intrigued by Jesus but not quite sure what to do with him.

So it says now the crowd came. There was a custom that at the festival, they would release a prisoner whom the people had requested. We actually don't have anything outside the New Testament that confirms this practice, but it doesn't mean it didn't happen. It just seemed to be quite rare. My guess is that Pilate would come into a scene like this, where there's now a mob mentality, a riot that's starting to brew, and in an effort to quell that, he would release someone like Barabbas.

Who was Barabbas? He's a shadowy figure. He's one who has quite a past. It says that he was a part of the insurrectionists. There was apparently a group that had been arrested for attempted insurrection, and they had committed murder in the midst of all of that. We don't know Barabbas' specific role. We don't know if he was the one carrying out the murder or not. But rather, he's a part of this group. So you can imagine a crowd that's rallied up to this sort of fervor and Pilate's thinking, here's

one way we could quell the efforts. Let's give them one of theirs back. So they would release a prisoner.

You see this kind of scene playing out in which the crowd is insisting that Pilate do what it says he would usually do. There is a pattern to this but look at verse 9, where Pilate begins to engage the crowd.

**"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead." vv. 9-11**

So, he addresses the crowd and asks if they want him to release this king of the Jews. No doubt there's sarcasm in Pilate's voice. No doubt he's in some ways mocking Jesus because Jesus here is completely in the control of those that are furthest from God. He's in control of the religious and political leaders. Pilate asks if they want him to release this so-called king of the Jews. And the crowd has been riled up. You see the religious leaders working within. I imagine they're working their way through the crowds shouting, "Barabbas, Barabbas, Barabbas," stirring up the crowd to not release Jesus because their whole plan is to crucify and kill Jesus.

The religious leaders are in there, and Pilate picked up on this. He knew it was out of their own self-interest. But the religious establishment and the political establishment were in cahoots. They were working together. Their ends were tied up and linked together. If Pilate controlled the religious establishment, he could help control the crowds. And if the religious establishment was beholden to the political establishment, they could have power and authority. They worked together on this.

**"What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. "Crucify him!" they shouted. "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified." vv. 12-15**

Pilate is in this pivotal moment in which he's sensing this fervor in the crowd, but you see the tension in him. I don't think it's out of a sense of justice. I don't think it's out of any of that. He's just trying to figure out how to work with the riotous crowd. What should he do with Jesus? "What do you want me to do," he asked. And they yelled, "Crucify him." Then he asked, "What crime has he committed?"

As the readers of Mark, we know Jesus has not committed any crime. All of that has been false accusations, but notice that the crowd is in such a fervor they don't even respond to the question. They just yell all the louder, "Crucify him, crucify him!" It's at this moment that Pilate, in an act of cowardice and political expediency, simply says, "Release Barabbas to them."

He had Jesus flogged, which was a brutal process. It was a process that preceded crucifixion in which the individual being flogged would be tied up to a pole and whipped until the flesh on their back had just disappeared. It was brutal; it was violent. Many would die at the flogging

before they even made it to the cross. Pilate had Jesus flogged, and he handed him over to be crucified. It's a sobering scene.

We can understand the fervor of a crowd riled up for its own ends. You sense a lynching at the hands of a mob that's riled up by the religious leaders for their own ends. Who are instigating and working within that. The political leaders are trying to maintain control and power. But it's all at the hands of this King Jesus. It goes on in verse 16, and here is where I believe you see a coronation and inauguration of an entirely different King.

**The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him." vv. 16-20**

The soldiers wanted their pound of flesh as well. So they called all of them together and began to mock him with this immense irony and paradox. They throw the purple robe, the color of royalty, on Jesus. They take a crown not of jewels, which would be beholden to a king like Jesus; instead, they twist thorns together, press it on his head, and begin to mock him. "Hail King of the Jews. Hail King of the Jews." The whole time, Mark is drawing us in at the paradox of these soldiers, mocking them, who don't even realize that they are, in fact, inaugurating Jesus. They don't understand that all along, this kingdom has been from death comes life. The kingdom of God has been this reversal of how we understand the way the world works.

The old creation and the world's kingdoms dynamics come into play through violence, coercion, and power over all of those things. They are throwing everything they have at Jesus. The curveball will be in two weeks when we read about the resurrection in which that old creation is quite literally dying off. Jesus is fundamentally inaugurating a new creation that does not function like the kingdoms of this world. And when it gets wrapped up in the kingdoms of this world, it becomes something different than the kingdom of God.

Mark clearly wants us to see the contrast between the way of Jesus—of silence, of nonviolence, of enduring, of through death comes life, directly contrasted with the kingdom and the empire of Rome with Barabbas—who's this figure that's been involved in all these shady things. He wants us to look at these two kingdoms. He wants us to see how starkly different they are.

And in many ways, Mark is asking us, through Pilate, the same question. What are we to do with the King of the Jews? What am I to do with the King of the Jews? Do I twist together the thorns and put it on his head? Do I mock him, "Hail King of the Jews?" Or do I come before him in adoration out of a recognition that the very death that Jesus is about

to endure was for you and me? Do we, like the crowd, get stirred up? Are we more like Barabbas? Are we more like the crowd yelling, crucify him, crucify him? Not out of the sense that we need his death but rather out of that frenzy of a mob that has their own agenda, and Jesus needs to bring that about. They have their own ends that they are desiring. So they will yell crucify him, not because they need him as savior, but because they need him to fulfill their deepest longing.

Do we hail him, king of all creation, the way the Roman centurion in the moment Jesus died did? "Surely he was the son of God." Mark has brilliantly been withholding someone figuring out the identity of Jesus. Remember, you and I were privy to that in the first few verses of the gospel. Nowhere in the text has someone figured out who Jesus is until a Roman centurion, at the moment Jesus died, says, "Surely he was who he says he was." Do you hail him as king like that Roman centurion? Or do you hail him as king like the Roman soldiers? It's a question that should provoke us. It's a question in many ways that should haunt us. What do we do with this? What do you do with a God who bleeds? What do you do with a God who dies? There's a radically new idea in the history of the world that God would die.

Well, as I mentioned at the beginning, I believe there are three meanings to this story, and there's probably more than that. Mark is a brilliant writer. But the three that I want to pull out are the political meaning, the theological meaning, and the personal meaning.

So let's return to that first question in verse 2 again as Pilate looks at Jesus and asks, "Are you king of the Jews?" What relationship does Jesus have with politics? Jesus' response is a bit nebulous, a bit ambiguous, and, I think, intentional. "Your words, not mine; you have said so." Jesus is playing coy because, on one hand, he's saying that he is not a political leader. But on the other hand, he's making claims of kingship when he is, in fact, a political leader. He's not a political leader in the categories that come to mind for you and me. He's not Republican or Democrat or Independent or whatever it is. We map that onto Jesus, but Jesus has nothing to do with that. He's a political leader in the sense that he re-arranges all of our understandings of even how power works.

There's a fundamental sort of bomb dropped in the history of the world in which weakness is, in fact, strength. That is a radically different understanding of politics. It's not used to coerce, not used to power over others, to push an agenda through, but rather Jesus' involvement with politics is one of which he says, "I am recreating the world not through those power structures but through something entirely different." Jesus is saying yes and no regarding politics. Yes, he is in the sense that it would impact social relationships because that's more or less what politics boils down to. It's the shared distribution or trying to work out together how you share finite resources in a community. That's all politics is. But Jesus is saying that the way of doing politics is now radically different.

In the book of Acts, the church is trying to unpack all that Jesus meant. And what you notice is the times that the church flourishes was not when they were synced up with the political systems. It's actually much

more when they're being persecuted that the church expands and explodes. There's brilliant research out there. There's one book by a sociologist named Rodney Stark. He talks about the rise of Christianity and identifies how this Jesus movement took over the world as it was known. What's fascinating is he details it from a sociological perspective.

One of the two things he makes note of is that there were two main influences. The first is the way that the church cared for the unborn. It says in the Roman world, in a patriarchal world, young girls who were born really had no use. In Roman practices, they would leave them outside. They called it exposure. And those little children would eventually die. They'd die from exposure. The church would have none of that. The early church went around and took those babies and brought them into the community. They cared for them and raised them up.

It was a radically different practice. He says their dignity, their approach to life was so profound that it cut across the way that the world understood the dignity of life and began to flip Rome upside down. Women flocked to the Jesus movement because they recognized a dignity given to them that the rest of the world did not see. The church took care of them.

Stark goes on to say the other aspect of care was their intense love for the poor. Remember that text in Acts in which they would say there were no needy among them. They'd bring all their wealth together and redistribute it to ensure that everyone was cared for properly. It says their immense care for the poor, not just those in the church but those outside the church, began to flip the world around.

Now, my question to you is, was that conservative? Was that liberal? It's just the church being the church. From our categories, if we want to try to map that on there, it's actually quite ambiguous. "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You've said it so. Your words, not mine."

We get so caught up in these political games, but Jesus, the whole time, is saying that it's a different game that we're playing. The kingdom of God doesn't need those power structures of the world. It operates completely differently. And when you try to pin down the church—where do they land on this or that—we're just doing kingdom work. So, there's a sense in which Jesus is intentionally nebulous, bringing about a radically different understanding of what it means to exist in the world. Again, give to Caesar what's Caesar's; give to God what's God's.

It's interesting because in that scene in Mark 12, you see Jesus trying, or not really trying; he is, in fact, riding this fence where he says, "Caesar can have his taxes, pay your taxes." So, on the one hand, he's saying be engaged, be involved. But on the other, he's like, "But give to God what's God's." Again, on that coin that they would have brought before Jesus would have been the inscription, the very image, not of God but of Caesar. So Jesus says, "Give to Caesar what's his; it looks like his image is on there." But the brilliant answer is, "Give to God what's God's." He's saying that the one holding the coin has the very image of God inscribed on him or her.

All of us, if you have the image of God on you, which you do, that is what is given to God. So I think the point is politics is always fundamentally

everywhere, a penultimate good. It is never meant to be the most important good; it's always secondary. In our world, in this day and age, politics wants to consume more and more of your allegiance. It is trying to demand your highest allegiance, but it was never meant to do that. And in some ways, we need to put it back in its place as a penultimate good. It's something that will not exist in the kingdom of God. It will be radically different. It is penultimate. It is something that we can, at times, get so lost in. But Jesus says, give to Caesar what's Caesar's, but give to God what's God's. And when he says that, what he's asking is for your ultimate allegiance.

Have you given your allegiance, your full allegiance, to something other than Jesus? Because if you have, Jesus is asking you to bring that back to him. The question being asked is not if you have an allegiance. The question is, will you give that allegiance to Jesus? Will you lay that before Jesus' feet? He will ask for the entirety of who we are. He will ask for our full heart, and a divided heart will not function. Where does your allegiance land?

The second aspect is the theological meaning. The reality is that Jesus, here in this scene, is communicating something about the very character of God that we could never imagine. The very character of God is what we see before Pilate. What you notice right away is that Jesus is silent before his accusers. This is Mark waving a giant flag for us to remember Isaiah 53. This text is about the suffering servant. Way back in Isaiah, the prophet had prophesied that the one that God will send will be one who will remain silent before its accusers. He'll be pierced for our transgressions. He'll be cursed and killed on behalf of us.

What we're learning in the theological understanding of this text is that God is a God who stands in solidarity with us as broken people. It's beautiful the fact that he endures the humiliation, the shame, the punishment; he endures all of that. If you have ever experienced that, God has as well. Whatever injustice you've experienced, God has experienced that. Whatever pain you're walking through, Jesus has endured that. Whatever humiliation that you've walked through, Jesus has experienced that. You are not alone in the brokenness. It is a profound reality that God would take on flesh and bleed. Don't miss that. Don't miss what that means for you and for me.

God himself can suffer. God himself can be humiliated. God himself will experience death. Most of us have this image of God like he's distant, that he's angry that he's upset, but the problem with that image is you've completely lost it because he is right next to you in the midst of the trial. He's right with you, suffering alongside you. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for he is with me."

Church, the promise was never that we would skate through this life without struggle, without pain, without that diagnosis, without that broken relationship, without whatever it is. The promise is that you would not be left alone in that. And that is what we need. As Jesus takes beating after beating, he's sitting with his eyes filled with tears alongside you. It is a radically new understanding of God.

What view of God do you have? Do you view him as distant and removed? Sit in this text. Watch him endure the pain that you endure. Watch him endure the brokenness that you experience. He's isolated. He's alone. His close ones have all abandoned him. Jesus is experiencing this agony along with you. What is your view of God?

Lastly, the text gets more personal. The third meaning of this text is the personal. It's unquestionable that what Mark is doing with Barabbas here is he wants you to see this character of Barabbas and don't miss that it's Jesus who died in the place of Barabbas. Barabbas was guilty. He'd already been found guilty. He'd been condemned. He was a murderous insurrectionist. And yet the crowd, in such a fervor, asked for him. And who did they kill in place of Barabbas but the innocent Jesus?

In this text, the personal aspect is you and I are Barabbas. We are they who stand condemned. We have screwed this life up. We are, in fact, sinful. We are worthy of death, and yet Jesus steps into that place. He is substituted for our own failure. Do you remember Mark 10:45? "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Barabbas stands in as a figure that you and I must relate to. We may not have led an insurrection; we may not have murdered someone, but we, too, have a shadow side. We, too, have a sort of shadowy background in which our failures, our sins, are ultimately what put Jesus on the cross. What I worry we miss in this is we look at the crowd and we debate who killed Jesus. The reality is your sin, and my sin killed Jesus. Your sin and my sin put Jesus on the cross. We are the ones in that crowd condemning him saying that he die in our place. We need that sort of substitution. We are Barabbas. We are the crowds.

Where does your heart fall? Where is your heart in this? Don't read this with a sense of pride and arrogance, thinking, look at that crowd. How could they? How did they miss it? Where does your heart fall? Do you recognize your sin as casting and condemning Jesus? Yet Jesus steps in on our behalf. He takes the death that we deserve. Jesus died so that we might go free. Jesus was humiliated so that we may be dignified. Jesus was condemned so we might be liberated. Jesus stepped in on our behalf, and just like Barabbas, we are in need of someone to take the penalty that was due for us. And Jesus—the very king of the universe, God in the flesh—will die on your behalf.

It is stunning. It is provocative. And it challenges every concept, both of God and power and how the world operates. All of this changes in this moment when Jesus, ironically, doesn't say a word. He simply stands in for Barabbas. Church, may we never forget the depth of that. May we never forget the stunning reality of Jesus substituting himself for us.

The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann has this great line. He says, "The knowledge of the cross brings a conflict of interest between God who has become man and man who wishes to become God. Most of

us are like Pilate, the crowd, the religious leaders saying that we are the ones in power and authority. We wish to take the place of God. But God says, "No, I will become man. And I will take your place as man."

This morning, we get to celebrate communion. We get to come to the tables, and we get to take these elements and hear the words spoken over you that the body of Christ was broken for you, the blood of Christ was poured out for you. We take that with the realization that Jesus has ascended to kingship, not through the normal means, but rather through suffering and from death. And as we come, as followers of Jesus, we take these elements. The invitation is open for all who claim to follow Jesus, that we come fresh to these elements every time we come to the table. Paul would say when we do that, we profess the Lord's death until he comes. Because it is the moment in which he steps in for us like he stepped in for Barabbas. So my prayer is as we come to the tables, we come with that realization.

I want to invite you to spend a moment with the Lord. Maybe it's in the confession of the way that you've allowed your allegiance to be torn in different directions. Maybe it's out of a diminished view of God that you've lost the edge of what all of this text means, and you need to come back to the simple elements of bread and of juice and say, God, this reality is more profound than I could ever imagine.

Or maybe you're wracked with this idea, "I didn't realize I was condemned by my own sin, my own death, and I need Jesus to step in in place of it." It is never too late to turn back to God. And God is inviting us forward to take these elements to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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