

*As follows in Jesus' name:*

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. 2 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 3 And the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

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.**

16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

21 And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. 22 And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This afternoon/evening, we take up St. Mark's accounting of Jesus' trial before the secular authority, the Roman governor, Pilate.

The mockery of justice that preceded this while Jesus was tried by the Jewish leaders all night was continued by the Roman governor, albeit against his better judgment.

Pilate was well used to the instigations and manipulations of the Jewish leaders.

He was in town, not because this was his normal residence, but because of the Passover Festival.

— It is better to be on hand at such things... to be able to deal with the issues immediately, rather than deal with the aftermath of mistakes made by others.

I wouldn't doubt he went to Jerusalem wondering what shenanigans the Jews would play this year. And on this particular day, they started rather early.

Pilate wasn't a fool. It didn't take him long to realize that Jesus was innocent.

St. Mark reports **he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.**

But he was also amazed at Jesus because He wasn't helping His own case — a matter of life & death.

It's almost as if Jesus wanted to die... He didn't defend Himself.

He didn't deny the accusation made against Him — that He was the king of the Jews.

Instead, He remained silent throughout His trial, allowing the vehemence of the Jews to stand.

So Pilate tried to take on the role of Jesus' protector all by himself, but as we know, it was to no avail.

It's hard to determine which party initiated the conversation about the prisoner release,

whether Pilate or the crowd, but Pilate certainly tried to take advantage of the opportunity.

Hoping that the crowd would recognize Jesus' innocence and desire that He be released,

Pilate makes the first request, **"Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"**

This bloody, tired, beaten-up man who wouldn't even defend Himself would appear as no threat.  
Pilate wasn't afraid of Him as an insurrectionist, and so first offers Him to the people,  
even though, He yet stood there uncondemned.  
But the chief priests were a step ahead of him, having stirred up the crowds against Jesus already.

And it is at this point that we see the reality of the Gospel shine brilliantly, played out in real time.  
It is reasonable to assume that there were 3 criminals slated for crucifixion that morning,  
Barabbas being one of them.  
And it probably is fair to assume that he was the most notorious of the 3,  
since Pilate wants to give Jesus the best chance at being selected over the criminal.  
Barabbas was already convicted, declared guilty of insurrection & murder in an attempted rebellion.  
What good society would want such a man released back to them?  
And who would request such a villain over and against this passive, innocent Jesus fellow?  
And yet, the crowd cries out for Barabbas to be released.

But then Pilate does something that is equally incredible: without regard for true justice,  
Pilate asks the mob what they desire for Jesus, since they cried for Barabbas' release.  
This was not their call. They were not the judge appointed by Rome.  
And yet, Pilate, more than likely in frustration, asks them how they would like this all to be resolved.  
“**Crucify Him.... Crucify Him,**” they shout, till it becomes too much.  
These shouts illicit one more assertion of innocence from Pilate: “**Why? What evil has He done?**”  
to which they do not, and cannot give an answer.

Regardless of Jesus' innocence, and in fulfillment of the Holy Spirit's words through Caiaphas,  
Pilate thinks it **better that one man die for the people.** John 11:50  
He does not want to see this mob form a riot at the Passover Festival.

But while we acknowledge that it is the sinful and evil intent of the Jewish leaders and the mob  
that all this happened...  
and while it is the feckless attempts of Pilate to appease these sinners that allows it...  
it is the Father's will that these things take place.  
As Jesus has taken upon Himself the sins of the world,  
so that He is the one and only sinner in the eyes of His heavenly Father,  
it is the Father's rightful condemnation upon Jesus that the High Priest sinfully declared.

And so, what we see with Barabbas is the Gospel reality for us.  
Barabbas, as his name means, is the “son of a father,” a son of Adam, just as you and I are.  
He is a rebel and insurrectionist against God's authority,  
and a murderer who has hated, harmed, and killed his fellow man.  
Barabbas epitomizes the corruption living in you and me.  
What good and just God would want us released into this world?  
We are just as guilty of murderous hatred as Barabbas.  
We are just as guilty of bearing false witness as the high priests.  
We are just as guilty of following the ungodly influences of peer pressure and society.  
We are just as guilty of perverting justice as Pilate.  
And yet, none of us needs to bear the punishment for our rebellion and insurrection against God.

Instead, we see the true and only-begotten Son of the Father, Jesus Christ, who has taken our place.  
It was the unconvicted, innocent, guiltless, and virtuous Man who was substituted,  
who has taken our condemnation on Himself before the Father's justice.  
He bears our mockery, our beatings, our crucifixion, our forsakenness and God's wrath  
as He bears the entire burden of our guilt and pays the ultimate, the final, price for our sin.

Just as willingly as He took Barabbas' place, so willingly He has taken your place.  
Where He received hatred and murder, He gives to you His love and eternal life.  
Where He was mocked and beaten, He blesses and heals.  
Where He was condemned, He pronounces you guiltless and holy,  
giving you His righteousness, innocence, and blessedness with which to serve Him.

...

Where Barabbas epitomizes the reality of our redemption,  
another man epitomizes the reality of our life of sanctification.  
As Jesus was led to Golgotha, Simon of Cyrene was compelled to walk the mile with Jesus,  
bearing upon his shoulders the cross his Savior.  
It was not a cross that Simon asked for, but was given to him, laid upon him.  
In this way, he served his Lord, who was serving him.

We cannot know with certainty, but it seems that St. Mark leaves us clues as to Simon's life afterward.  
St. Mark lists his two sons, Alexander and Rufus, which would be peculiar facts,  
if neither Simon nor his sons were prominent people, especially in the Church.  
But it seems reasonable to conclude that Simon of Cyrene, along with his sons, at least,  
considered this act of service, and went not only one mile with Jesus, but the second also,  
and served Him and His people even after Jesus' death for their sins.

May we, when called upon by God to take up our cross and follow Jesus,  
willingly and patiently bear the cross He gives,  
and return to Him the love and care bestowed upon you to those around you,  
that they and their children may know Jesus and rejoice in their status with you,  
not only as a "son of a father", but as a "son of God" through your dear brother, Jesus.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*