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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
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Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
March 19, 2014  
3<sup>rd</sup> Midweek Lent

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 56 Passion: Betrayal, and Capture  
Hymns: 342; 154; 157; 554:5,6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 15:6-15

6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. 7 And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. 8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. 9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. 12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!" 14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!" 15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: *Remarkable incidents from Jesus' Passion*

Our meditation this evening focuses on an incident with which we should all be very familiar, but it is one that deserves our review. It is necessary for us to look at this incident from two different perspectives that we might comprehend the wonder of what actually happened that day, not only in Pilate's court but what was taking place in the court of divine justice a well. So it is that we ask for the Spirit blessings as we meditate upon the -

**THEME:** Choosing between Jesus or Barabbas.

I guess what gets to us in this incident from Jesus' Passion is -  
**I The Heartless Choice of the World.**

We can't help but wonder how they could look at Jesus and turn against Him? Jesus had been among them doing good, and healing so many of the people, and teaching them the truth of God! Jesus had been hailed by the crowds gathered in Jerusalem as a King, as the Son of David! That was just on the previous Sunday morning, only five short days earlier. Throughout that week the people had gathered around Jesus at the temple courts and listened to all that He had to say. But then, as they were gathered together so early on that Friday morning, they were easily swayed by the chief priests and leaders of the people.

Yes, they wanted Pilate to do for them what had been done in the past, to adhere to custom, and release a prisoner at the time of the Passover. Pilate saw this as the perfect opportunity to free Jesus! He didn't anticipate how the people could turn on one so quickly that had drawn much popular attention and following. But the choice was really already made by the Sanhedrin.

This choice was totally self-serving. Pilate was correct in their assessment that it was out of envy that they had brought Jesus to him. The other choice, Barabbas, was scary, for Barabbas was not only being held for sedition, that he tried overthrow the government, but also for murder. He was a cold-blooded killer! No one in his right mind would choose Barabbas! Pilate was sure that common sense, or at least common decency would prevail. If nothing else a sense of justice had to sway the people.

The Sanhedrin's choice had nothing to do with justice. Not for the Chief Priests, and not for the people. It was time for Jesus to go. They would be rid of Him, once and for all! They did not look upon the two

men and consider which of them was the better man. They did not consider the crimes that Barabbas had committed that landed him on “death row.” It was getting rid of the One that had become a bother to them. For them, it had nothing to do with justice or righteousness.

So the question that we must consider is not so simple. It isn't just whom have you chosen? Then we quickly, with a little sense of self-righteousness, say, “**I chose Jesus!**” How often do we find Jesus presence in our lives a little inconvenient? How often do we make what we perceive to be “little” choices that are in fact choices that exclude Jesus? How often do we favor the broad and easy way and ideas of the world over the narrow way of Christ and His gospel? The world can hold sway over us as easily as the crowd was swayed by the Jewish Council, or Pilate was intimidated by the Jewish Council, so that at any given moment in our daily walk we might make the selfish choice and say, “**Barabbas**”, and then, what about Jesus? “**Away with this man! Release unto us Barabbas!**”

Now consider –

## **II. God's Gracious Choice.**

Boy, was it ever Barabbas' lucky day! NO, it wasn't that at all. It was a day of amazing grace that visited Barabbas. He deserved the just sentence of his crimes, He deserved to be condemned. He deserved to be crucified, and more. Barabbas deserved to endure eternity in hell. But on that Good Friday God chose Barabbas, and Jesus was condemned. Jesus was crucified. Jesus endured the God forsaken-ness of hell! And Barabbas was set free. What a choice God the Father made! He sent His own Son, His beloved Son to the cross that the guilty might go free.

What we are so thankful for is that this was not a one for one exchange. The choice God made in setting the condemned free included far more than just Barabbas. It included a world of sinners, and not even only those who were alive at that moment in time, or those who had lived up to that moment in time. God sent Jesus to die on the cross, “Once and for all” as Paul wrote to the Romans: “**For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all**” (Romans 6:10).

And this was an effective sacrifice, for it was the holy precious blood of Christ, the divine blood with infinite value, that was shed for all

sinner. So we are confident **“that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”** (2 Corinthians 5:19).

And so we see for ourselves how God chose us when He chose Barabbas, and condemned Jesus. It is just as we sang in the hymn before the sermon:

**TLH 154:2:** Was it for crimes that I had done He groaned upon the tree? Amazing pity, grace unknown, And love beyond degree.”

### **III. How Does this Choice Play out in Life?**

What kind of day was it perceived to be by Barabbas? His “lucky day?” Or was it for him the day when he was visited by the grace of God? Did Barabbas simply gloat over how he “got off”? Did he go back to the life of crime and terror that characterized his life before he was caught and imprisoned? We can’t know. However the question is one that we must contemplate for ourselves.

You see, we are every bit as much the recipients of God’s grace as was Barabbas. We are every bit as deserving of the death sentence, the condemnation, as was Barabbas. So how are we to respond in our lives to the second chance at life that the Lord has given us? Shall we return to the pig sty, the filth of this world from which we were rescued? It is still alluring to us. And that in itself is disgusting, even to us. Yes, we are disgusted by the filth of this world, and our own sin, but we find ourselves drawn back into temptation and sin. We find ourselves rationalizing away the guilt of the sins which attract us. We might say, “Everybody does it, so it isn’t such a big deal.” Yes, everybody covets, everybody gossips, everybody lusts, and so sin entices us. It is only the continual working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives that gives proper direction to our lives. We pray for that grace as we recall the sufferings of our Lord.

**TLH 140:4** Grant that I Thy passion view With repentant grieving  
Nor Thee crucify anew By unholy living.  
How could I refuse to shun Every sinful pleasure  
Since for me God’s only Son Suffered without measure?”

Barabbas or Jesus? Praise God we have been brought to choose Jesus, our Redeemer and our Lord!

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.