

Lent 2018 – The Battles of Lent

"The Battle of Pilate's Court"

Text: Mark 15:1-15

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in Jesus Christ, who suffered beyond what we could ever imagine – as our substitute – so that we might never know what true suffering is. Amen.

The text for this evening is found recorded in the Gospel of Mark, the 15th Chapter, beginning with the 1st verse:

^{ESV} **Mark 15:1-15** *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.*

These are the verbally inspired words by which we will be filled and strengthened this evening. We prepare our hearts for the study of God's holy Words with this simple prayer, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Christ Jesus, our Substitute:

This evening – as part of our Lenten preparation and self-examination – we return to yet another familiar scene of our Lord's Passion, and again

we seek to recognize that place as the battle site that it was. The goal is not to create a false view or idea, but to recognize the reality that actual spiritual battles truly took place at these sites. This evening we visit *Pilate's Court*, and we recognize it as the battle for *justice*.

Walk this evening through the dusty streets of Jerusalem and witness, with your mind's eye, the scene that unfolds before you. As you round the final corner and enter the courtyard of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, a terrifying scene opens before you. The disgraceful spectacle should not be all that difficult for us to imagine. Modern television images have enabled us to picture the scene in Pilate's Courtyard with what is undoubtedly a great deal of accuracy. News crews have often beamed live images into our living rooms of Middle-Eastern mobs lusting for blood. There the threat of swift and brutal violence apparently always simmers just below a thin veneer of civility, ever ready to erupt. So it was that the Jewish leaders apparently had little trouble whipping the crowd in Jerusalem into a bloodthirsty frenzy on Good Friday. What, exactly, they were so upset about was probably lost on the vast majority of them. In the end, as far as the mob was concerned, it didn't really matter *whose* blood was shed, just so their dark yearning for violence and brutality could be satisfied.

Any conscience problems that the mob might have had were immediately dispelled by their religious leaders, who assured them that their anger was righteous and their lust for violence justified. With the restraining shackles of civility loosed, the crowds gave themselves over to their bloodlust. Someone was going to die, and die horribly.

As you make your way into this maelstrom of blind rage, you come to realize that the proceedings have reached the point where Pilate is again offering his annual "Passover pardon." In an effort to please the Jews, once each year at the time of the Passover Pilate would grant clemency and freedom to one prisoner held in the Roman prison. This year the choice he offers is between Jesus of Nazareth and a rather notorious character known as Barabbas.

Not much is known to you about Barabbas. The general consensus is that he is where he deserves to be – a criminal worthy of confinement and punishment. His release would, in fact, be a profound miscarriage of justice. Nevertheless, your curiosity is piqued by the man. Having never seen him, you force your way through the enflamed mob in an effort to catch a glimpse of the man's face. As you struggle to gain a vantage point from which you could see this Barabbas character, Pilate announces his pardon. Having been released, Barabbas disappears into the crowd that has just inexplicably asked for his release. Still you

struggle toward the spot where he entered the crowd, your curiosity now more intense than ever. After Jesus is condemned and the crowd begins to disperse to line "the Way of Sorrows" (the name given to the road that leads to the execution site – Golgotha) you finally find yourself behind the man who had been released instead of Jesus. As he turns, now directly in front of you, your inexplicable curiosity with the man is answered when you see that the face of the man who stands before you is your own. Barabbas is you.

While we obviously have no idea just what Barabbas looked like, it's always a mistake to view these Good Friday proceedings in a detached, spectator-like fashion. We rob ourselves whenever we recall the events of our Lord's Passion as though we had neither stake nor role in those events. The fact is we had both.

Compare the role played by Barabbas with our own. Barabbas was guilty – a fact which no one denies. The Bible describes him as "**a notorious prisoner**" in Matthew 27. (The Greek here refers to an infamous, well-known, criminal.) Of his guilt, then, there was no question. So far the comparison between him and us holds true, doesn't it? There is no question in any Christian's mind of his own personal guilt. No true Christian denies that he is guilty of breaking God's holy law and therefore deserving of punishment. This truth is absolutely beyond question.

The next thing we note about Barabbas is that the ruling authority, in this case Pontius Pilate, set him up as the alternative to the death of Jesus Christ. In other words, the guilty man (Barabbas) would die, or the innocent man (Jesus) would die. Finally Barabbas, though obviously guilty, was spared by Pilate, who condemned Jesus in his place. The obvious miscarriage of justice ought to be lost on no one.

In all of this the description of Barabbas is a description of each one of us. In our case, God the Father was the ruling authority who determined that his own Son would die for the sins of the world, or each one of us would die for his own, personal sin. As with Barabbas, each one of us has now been declared not guilty by God the Father, for our sentence has been pronounced upon Jesus. As he did for Barabbas, so also now Jesus serves as *our* substitute. Yet where is *justice* in any of this? How is *justice* served when the innocent is condemned and the guilty is released?

To understand, we first need to recognize how our perspective of this entire account shifts dramatically when we put our own face on Barabbas. It's so easy, so natural, to condemn a stranger like Barabbas – especially when he is identified as the evil man that he was. Yet when I place my own face on the person of Barabbas – when I acknowledge that I am

Barabbas – then my perception of justice and the events of Good Friday are inexplicably altered. I am no longer quite so hard on Barabbas, although I should be. I no longer view him as quite so despicable, although I ought to. I no longer imagine that the release of Barabbas was as great a perversion of justice as I once thought, although I should so think. What all of this teaches me is that my view of justice is tainted by my own pride and self-love, but it should *not* be.

The fact is Jesus did not just serve as the substitute for Barabbas; he served as *my* substitute. Yet that fact should in no way change our natural sense of injustice at what happened to Jesus on Good Friday. Because I was released (not just Barabbas) changes nothing. In fact my natural inclination toward believing that I am somehow inherently better than Barabbas, and therefore somehow more worthy to be pardoned, is *in itself* proof of a profound moral deficiency. Each of us needs to come to terms with the fact that had any one of us been released instead of Barabbas, the apparent miscarriage of justice would have been no less appalling, no less egregious.

Human beings don't get to define justice according to our own personal views, or to allow our definition of justice to be altered by our own perceived strengths and weaknesses or by the current thought-trend of their peers. That's the sort of nonsense that is currently running rampant in our society. We have been infested with legions of self-proclaimed "social justice warriors" who imagine that their own personal views, based on nothing in particular, set the standard of "justice" not necessarily for themselves but for everyone else on the entire planet. Reasoned thought is as foreign to them as the acceptance of any authority that exists outside of themselves that objectively defines "justice."

Social justice warriors filled Pilate's Court, and the result was predictable. Groupthink dictated that Jesus should die, despite the fact that there was absolutely no evidence to convict him. Groupthink dictated that Barabbas should be released, despite the overwhelming evidence of his guilt. No thought, no appeal to any established code of justice is necessary. Just groupthink and the emotion of the minute: "*Yeah, and even the scribes and Pharisees agree with us! Crucify him!*" Pilate actually tried reason: "**Why? What evil has he done?**" Their response was the blind, unreasoning: "**Crucify him!**" That is, in part, the enemy against which Jesus fought in Pilate's Court – the twisted, perverted "justice" of man's sin-twisted mind.

Yet in all of this there still a most troubling question: *How could condemning Jesus and sparing Barabbas (and, through him, also you*

and me) ever represent justice as God himself defines it? How could such a thing ever be seen by God as "fair"?

The answer tells us exactly why Jesus had to fight the battle he did against man's idea of justice, and why we need to let God himself, and God alone, define justice for us. God is always just, but according to our own human ideas God does not always appear to be fair. Was, for example, God's condemnation of his own Son as our substitute *just*? Absolutely. Was it *fair*? Certainly not by any human standard. How could anyone consider it "fair" that the Innocent was condemned while the guilty was released? Yet this simple truth is the substance of the gospel itself. God placed the entire guilt of sinful mankind upon his innocent Son, and has credited the perfection of his Son to us. Jesus was condemned; we are forgiven.

For all of this we fall at the foot of the cross in humble awe of what an incredible Savior we have in Jesus Christ, and thank God for the divine justice that brings us eternal life. Rejected and scorned by each one of us, Jesus left heaven anyway, willingly choosing the path of rejection and misery to save us from what we surely deserved. He sacrificed himself for us – gave himself as our substitute – knowing that man would not only reject him on Good Friday, but that we would daily push him aside in favor of sin and rebellion. In this too, our Lord is magnified; for as we learn to recognize the true nature of our own sin and the enormity of our own guilt, so also we come to understand more fully just how much Jesus has done for each one of us when he substituted his justice for ours.

Heavenly Father, open my eyes to the true extent of my own sin; and then fill me with joy and thanksgiving in knowing that Jesus took every bit of my sin upon himself as my substitute, and that you now regard his sacrificial death as the fulfillment of your divine justice. Amen.

Weekly Hymn and Sermon Schedule

February 14

Hymns: 140 (1-4)
367, 263

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
Upper Room"*

Text: John 13:1-17

February 21

Hymns: 388 (1-3, 6)
143 (1-5), 261

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Gethsemane"*

Text: Mark 14:32-42

February 28

Hymns: 358, 171 (1-5)
260 (1, 4 & 6)

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
High Priest's
Palace"*

Text: Mark 14:53-64

March 7

Hymns: 652, 371 (1-6)
258 (1, 3-5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Pilate's Court"*

Text: Mark 15:1-15

March 14

Hymns: 360, 155
463 (1-2, 8)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
Streets of
Jerusalem"*

Text: Luke 23:26-31

March 21

Hymns: 153, 176
448 (1-2, 5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Golgotha"*

Text: Mark 15:22-32



St Paul Lutheran Church

Lent 2018

"The Battles of Lent"

- The Upper Room
- Gethsemane
- The High Priest's Palace
- Pilate's Court
- The Streets of Jerusalem
- Golgotha

-Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table for use next week-

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Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2018

The Opening Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

All: (Spoken) *Amen.*

Confession and Absolution (TLH 323)

Pastor: *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance, we confess our sins:*

All:

1. With broken heart and contrite sigh, a trembling sinner, Lord, I cry.
Thy pardoning grace is rich and free - O God, be merciful to me.
2. I smite upon my troubled breast, with deep and conscious guilt oppressed;
Christ and His cross my only plea – O God, be merciful to me.
3. Nor alms nor deeds that I have done can for a single sin atone.
To Calvary alone I flee – O God, be merciful to me.

Pastor: *Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. According to His authority, and by His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

All: And when, redeemed from sin and hell, with all the ransomed throng I dwell,
My blissful song shall ever be: God has been merciful to me.

The Reading of the Passion History

The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Pre Sermon Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

The Sermon – *The theme for our devotions this Lenten Season is*

"The Battles of Lent"

(Please turn to the back page for this evening's service details)

The Response – (Sung to the melody of Hymn 237)

1. *A mighty Fortress is our God, a trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from every need that hath us now o'ertaken.
The evil Foe means deadly woe;
Great guile and might his arms in fight;
On Earth is not his equal.*
2. *With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
This Lord of Hosts is Jesus Christ;
Our Savior-King, our Mighty God.
He holds the field forever.*

The Prayer of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: *Amen, Amen, Amen.* (Sung by all)

The Closing Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

Silent Prayer

Announcements

[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]