



John 18:39–40

39 But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release “the king of the Jews”?’ 40 They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Craig Tubman).

This is it. That last moment in the account of Jesus trial where he has the chance to go free. The last opportunity to declare an innocent man innocent. Pilate puts the question to the crowd. Today I will set someone free, it's either going to be Barabbas or Jesus – you can decide.

Now this seems to be a custom that the Romans had instituted. The Governor would release a prisoner as a sign of Rome's merciful spirit. In this moment as Pilate is caught in a situation where he is being pressured to condemn an innocent man to death, he goes to the crowd with this bargain of mercy.

It's a truly bizarre moment. You would be forgiven for thinking it was made up, add-

ed in by John to create tension. But it was not. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this event taking place. It is in fact historical. Barabbas, guilty of the crime of treason, causing uprisings against Rome, perhaps even murder, walks out of the Roman prison a free man. Jesus is handed over to be flogged and led to his death.

God himself really is the master author as he weaves his story into real time. In flesh and blood he pens the story of salvation in a way that boggles the mind. All the apostle John has done is record the story God himself was writing.

Whilst the Father, Son and Spirit are weaving something breathtaking, this moment presents to us all the weakness of the human condition on full display. Pilate – too

afraid to do what he knows is right. Bowing to the pressure of the crowds. Making public decisions based on the volume of the crowd's cries rather than on the integrity of his ruling. The crowd – is this the same crowd that welcomed Jesus as a coming King only a few days before? Their shouts of 'Hosanna' now cry 'crucify'. So easily persuaded by the religious leaders to condemn someone they once thought was their conquering king. And Barabbas – guilty, no leg to stand on, doesn't argue with the verdict and walks free.

Could this scene be any more corrupt or evil? And yet, the truly haunting part of this text is the reality that it is describing the human condition. Not the poor legal system of some ancient culture, nor an isolated event of religious groups missing

the mark. No, this moment is us. Isn't it? This is all of us, in our fear to not do what is right. It is all of us, in our own tendency to go with the crowd, to sing Jesus is Lord on Sunday and deny knowing him Monday afternoon. It is all of us, in being found guilty of sin with no real argument against it.

There is only one other character in this story. Jesus – the Son of God who willingly walks to the cross. Amongst all the chaos we see that the one who is condemned is in fact the rescuer. God is a masterful storyteller. On the eve of the Son dying on the cross, we see a guilty man walk free – a substitution – Jesus for Barabbas. This is the gospel.

To embrace the Christian faith means em-

bracing one humbling, yet liberating truth. That is, whilst you and I may indeed bow to fear over pressure or be swayed by the crowd, each and every one of us regardless of our own strengths and weaknesses most closely align with Barabbas. We are the guilty one set free.

Of course from the outside this all seems pretty grim doesn't it? "I've worked really hard in life, I'm a good person, I'm _____" - fill in the blank. No doubt there are many good things you could add into that description. But when it comes to standing before a holy God, who sees every action, every word, every thought, the only way you and I will avoid judgement is if we have a substitute.

I love the Apostle John's words in his first

letter.

‘My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.’ 1 John 2:1–2

I wonder whether John was thinking of Barabbas as he penned these lines?

Think & Pray

Jesus – the righteous one, the sacrifice, the substitute for our sins. You couldn’t write a better story if you tried but this is what God has done in our very world to

bring us back to him.

If this is all true it means that if you are a follower of Jesus you are now free. Why not reflect today on your freedom. Is it something you experience? If not, what is limiting your experience of this and what would it look like to not just know you are free but to feel free as well?

Why not pray and ask God to give you insight and joy into these things?