

**“King of the Jews”
Sermon for Sunday, March 4, 2018**

Judas has betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Jesus has been taken into custody by the High Priest Caiaphas and has spent the night in a dungeon beneath the High Priest’s home. Peter has been sitting in the courtyard around a fire... denying Jesus. The religious leadership has decided that Jesus is deserving of death for claiming his identity as God’s Messiah, but only Rome can administer that execution.

It must have been a long night... for Peter, for Jesus, for the disciples.

What would happen next?

SCRIPTURE: Mark 15:1-20

There are times when I hear this story and I think:

I would not have denied Jesus like Peter!

I would not have betrayed Jesus like Judas!

I would not have been disloyal like Caiaphas!

Or would I?

Perhaps all too often we are like Pilate.

As the Roman Prefect in Judea, he controlled who lived and who died.

He could have killed them both—Jesus and Barabbas.

He could have freed them both.

And yet, he allowed himself to be manipulated by the religious leadership...

and by the crowd... to keep the peace rather than speak the truth.

So he freed the guilty and convicted the innocent...

And then he washed his hands of the whole affair.

Are we like Pilate?

We’re afraid that being fully-devoted followers of Jesus will cost us too much.

We call ourselves Christians and yet remain citizens of this world kingdom instead of God’s kingdom.

Perhaps we try to wash our hands of our complicity in Jesus’ death—

blaming Judas, blaming the Jews, blaming the Romans, not wanting to admit that it is our sins that sent him to the cross... that we might be reconciled to God.

Perhaps we are like the religious leadership.

They above all people should have recognized Jesus of Nazareth as God's Messiah. He was the fulfillment of scriptural prophecy. Surely the words of the prophet Isaiah had to be ringing in their ears.

*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth...
He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;
Upon him was the punishment that made us whole and by his bruises we
are healed. (Isaiah 53)*

And yet, they couldn't see the truth in front of them because this Jesus threatened the status quo. He had overturned the tables in the Temple and called them hypocrites and blind guides!

He ate with sinners and outcasts, taught women and broke their laws. And he dared to forgive sins... which only God could do!

What about us? Do we ever worship tradition and "our laws" about how things should be and fail to see the revolution that Jesus is seeking to bring into our lives... into our world... into our church? Does Jesus threaten our "status quo"?

Perhaps we are like Barabbas

Jesus would lay down his life and Barabbas would go free...

An innocent life would be sacrificed to bring freedom to a guilty one.

We don't know what happened to Barabbas...

perhaps he continued his lawless ways and his encounter with Jesus changed nothing... or perhaps his encounter with Jesus that allowed him to become a changed man...

After his conviction, the guards would place a purple robe on Jesus to mock him. But purple was the most expensive dye in that day and therefore, purple fabric was only for the rich and the royal. In their mocking, they were speaking a truth that they did not know.

Today we add a purple ribbon to our crosses... the color of royalty.

Is Jesus the King of the Jews? Is Jesus the King of your life?

As the Sanctuary bells play, we will pass baskets and invite each household to take one purple ribbon to add to their cross.

If you do not have a cross, you can pick one up after the service. Be sure to pass the baskets up to the loge areas.