



The Servant King

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

The Abandonment of the King

Mark 15:1-15 | April 9, 2017

Introduction: This is week six in our seven-week sermon series, The Servant King.

The tide has turned against Jesus. All of his followers have scattered in fear. Jesus has been arrested by the Jewish high court on false pretense. But Jerusalem is an occupied city. Religious leaders do not have the power to execute blasphemers. For that, they will have to give Jesus over to the cruel hand of Rome. Yet, Jesus is a compelling figure even to Pilate, the Roman administrator. He can read between the lines—he knows that Jesus has awakened the jealousy of the religious elite. So Pilate gives the people what he imagined would be an easy choice. Jesus or Barabbas?

The name Barabbas means "son of the father" (bar=son; abba=father). The choice is set before Israel and all of humanity: who do you claim to be the true son of the Father? Which is the true King? To whom will you pledge loyalty? The contrast of these two men is striking.

Mark tells us that Barabbas joined in an insurrection, a coordinated effort to oust the Romans from Jerusalem and purify the holy city through blood and violence. Barabbas had even committed murder during this failed coup d'état. He is a symbol for the power we name unto ourselves and our struggle to overthrow the forces which impose themselves on us. Barabbas represents a kingdom built on fear, anger, jealousy, and retaliation.

In contrast we have Jesus. He was both of us, yet unlike us altogether. Though he was made of our flesh, yet he was free; not blind, craven, and fickle, like us. He was a silent lamb, who says not a word in his own defense. Jesus has moved beyond his own will, having given himself over to the will of his Father. He is free from fear, love incarnate. He was our healer and teacher, yet he was a light too bright to endure, because in his light our total depravity was disclosed. Jesus is not leading a revolt with swords and clubs. Instead Jesus tells his disciples to welcome little children and to be the ones who serve the most.

We are each an occupied city (at least besieged), a place meant for worship and communion, yet occupied by forces that reduce us to units of production--blips in a vast statistical analysis. By what means will we become truly holy and free; truly human? Today is set before us two "sons of the father", and only one can be true. What path will you choose? Will you ask for Barabbas or for Jesus?

Pray: Almighty and everlasting God, we confess that we love Barabbas. We love the false hope of overthrowing our enemies and vain struggles for power. We resist being led into a new order compelled by humble, sacrificial love.

Something deep within each of us cries out: Away, you that yields to Rome! Away, you that gives no defense! Give us a strong King – not one who casts away swords. Let the meek lamb be killed. Give us Barabbas.

And in our clinging to power and self-sufficiency we reject the fountain of life. We reject you because we don't like your way of saving the world. We don't want to suffer and forgive like you. Though we cast you away, forgive us and heal us, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God for ever and ever. Amen.

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Read: Mark 15:1-15

Discussion:

1. Since Barabbas means "son of the father" he is a kind of alternative savior. How do the concepts of insurrection and murder appeal as tools for salvation?
2. Where in contemporary life do you see the ways of Barabbas and Jesus at work?
3. Jesus is both servant and King. The people of Jerusalem welcomed him as healer and teacher, yet rejected him as King. Do you ever try to have servant Jesus without King Jesus? Maybe King, but not servant?
4. In our text the religious leaders make accusations against Jesus. Are there any accusations that you or someone you know carry against Jesus?

Application: The philosophical icon, Yoda, once said, "Fear is the path to the dark side." In 1 John 4:18 we read, "There is not fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear." Invite Holy Spirit to guide your heart and mind. List your top three fears at the moment. Imagine each one a wound. Describe how it affects you. Now imagine Jesus pouring out upon each fear/wound the oil of God's perfect love. What would it mean to be covered with love and free from fear? Pray to welcome, remember, and celebrate God's perfect love with greater intentionality this week.

Pray: Father, truly we are blind, fickle, and craven. We lack the courage to suffer and die for this broken world, yet what else can it mean to be a child of God? Can the way of the adopted child be other than that of the only begotten son? Fortify us for the excellence of knowing you in the power of your resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in your sufferings. Bring us nearer to your strange, beautiful joy, we pray. Amen.