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Mark 15:1-15 – *The Silence of the Innocent Man*

Preached at Trinity CRC

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Holy Week is the week that leads up to Resurrection Sunday.

It starts with Palm Sunday when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a colt and is hailed as the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Then we remember the events of that week that led to his crucifixion, death, and eventually his resurrection.

These are the most important events as we look at the life of Christ—

They are the most important events for us as Christians.

So every year we re-tell them...

And in a sense we relive them with Christ.

As his disciples 2,000 years later these are the events that shape our lives...

Without the cross and the empty tomb our faith is meaningless:

Without the death of Christ, there is no death to sin—

There is no forgiveness;

And without his resurrection there is no such thing as new life—

All hope vanishes and we live a meaningless existence here.

We experienced Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem at the start of the service...

But we know how quickly things turned on Jesus.

This morning we're going to look a little closer at Jesus' trial before Pilate as told by Mark...

And we're going to do it looking at it from 3 perspectives:

The Jewish leaders, Pilate, and Jesus.

SANHEDRIN

We'll start where the passage starts...

With the Jewish leaders.

I don't think they're CRC, but they do meet as a council in v. 1. (NRSV)

This council (translated as the Sanhedrin by the NIV) is made up of the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law...

And they've been pretty ticked off at Jesus since he came onto the scene.

Way back in chapter 3 of Mark's Gospel the Jewish leaders get together and plot how they are going to kill Jesus. (3:6)

See, Jesus poses a threat to their authority.

This group of men are the ruling elders of Israel...

They hold all of the power and decision-making authority;

They interpret God's Law and determine how people should live.

But Jesus comes in and shakes things up:

He eats with sinners;

He doesn't make his disciples fast;

He heals a man's hand on Sabbath.

He does things that Jews aren't supposed to do.

But he doesn't do it because he's rebelling...

No, he's claiming to have a higher authority than the Jewish leaders.

In chapter 14, in the scene right before our passage, Jesus is tried by this council (Sanhedrin).

The high priest asks him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" (14:61)

Jesus clearly says, "I am."

"And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (14:62)

Both of these images—

The Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One (Psalm 110:1);

And coming on the clouds of heaven (Dan 7:13)—

Are references to OT passages that have to do with authority.

They have to do with God establishing his kingdom on earth and setting someone in charge forever.

Jesus is claiming to be *that* person...

The one whom God gives all authority, dominion, and glory...

Every person on heaven and earth will worship this person...

Including the religious leaders.

And Jesus says, "Yes, it's me!"

Of course the Jewish leaders are upset by this...

This ordinary man is claiming to be more powerful than them.

He's claiming to be the fulfillment of their sacred Scriptures.

The high priest tears his clothes, accuses him of blasphemy...

And the council condemns him to death.

They take him to Pilate who has the authority to execute criminals...

But they can't tell Pilate that this man is claiming to be the "Messiah."

That wouldn't mean much to Pilate.

He's not a Jew and their religious squabbles don't really concern him.

So they have to put it in a way that will get Pilate's attention:

"This man is claiming to be the *king of the Jews*..."

PILATE

Pilate, or Pontius Pilate as we know him, was a Roman prefect.

Judea was under Roman authority and occupation at this time...

And Pilate was the one in charge, appointed by the emperor.

His job was to collect taxes, keep the peace, and look after Caesar's interests there. (Bock)

Pilate's main investment in this trial is keeping the peace in his region...

So for him the whole controversy revolves around this title: *the king of the Jews*.

Pilate asks Jesus, is this you? "Are you the king of the Jews?" (15:2)

This is no small charge...

Anyone claiming to be a king in Caesar's empire was challenging his authority.

Caesar is the head honcho...

And any challenge to Caesar was to be fiercely stomped out...

No matter what part of the empire it occurred.

Being called “king of the Jews” was a political statement.

It meant that Jesus was the leader of a group...

A group that was a potential threat to Rome...

Insurrectionists. Revolutionaries.

There was already a history of self-proclaimed “kings” or leaders of Jewish groups that rebelled against Roman authority. (Eugene Boring)

So this is what *Pilate* has in mind when he asks if Jesus is the “king of the Jews.”

From *Pilate’s point of view*, Jesus doesn’t pose a threat...

He’s an ordinary guy that these Jewish guys don’t like for some reason.

“What crime has he committed?” Pilate asks. (15:14)

Pilate is suggesting Jesus’ innocence here.

He sees no reason for this man to be crucified.

In fact, he’s even willing to let Jesus go if the people choose him over Barabbas.

JESUS

But what about Jesus?

What’s he doing this whole time?

Well, not much.

Mark portrays him as being pretty quiet.

Pilate seems like he’s at the tipping point—

About to side with Jesus and set him free—

A couple of convincing words from Jesus on his innocence and he’s probably good to go.

But Jesus remains silent.

Mark makes a point to say that Pilate was amazed by Jesus’ silence. (15:5)

Here is an innocent man—

Who obviously is not starting a revolution—

About to be condemned to death...

And he says nothing.

The only response that Pilate gets out of Jesus is an ambiguous one:

“Are you the king of the Jews?” he asks.

“You say.” (You have said so)

What does that even mean?

Is it a “yes?”

As in what you say is correct.

Is it a “No?”

As in *you* say so, but I do not.

Or is it a “yes but...?”

In front of the council of Jewish leaders when asked if he was the Messiah Jesus clearly said:

“I am.”

To Pilate he could just as easily said:

“I am the king of the Jews...but not in the way you think.”

“I’m not looking to start a political revolution.”

He could have defended himself saying that the leaders were jealous and out to get him...

Pilate probably would’ve believed him.

Remember Job?

The man who had everything taken away from him...

Who didn’t do anything to “deserve” all of the hardships brought on him?

Remember him?

Job knew he was innocent...and did *he* keep silent?

No!

Chapter after chapter all he does is plead his innocence.

In chapter 23—which Pastor Rich preach on 2 weeks ago—Job begs to be heard by God.

He wants a trial with God so that his innocence can be proved:

“God would not press charges against me.

⁷ There the upright can establish their innocence before him,
and there I would be delivered forever from my judge...

¹⁰ ...he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Job desperately desires a trial so that he can be heard...

He knows he's innocent!

And here's Jesus with a golden opportunity to plead his case...

The trial has been brought to him.

Instead the innocent man maintains his silence...

And allows them to lead him to the cross.

In the words of NT scholar Eugene Boring:

“Here is not the powerful Son of God who acts, but the truly human Jesus, who has resolved to suffer and die according to the will of God.”

Jesus didn't die because one of his 12 disciples betrayed him.

Jesus didn't die because of the envy of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus didn't die because Pilate was more concerned with crowd satisfaction than with justice.

Jesus died because it was the will of God.

Jesus knew this was coming.

Back in chapter 8 (v. 31) he tells his disciples that he *must* suffer many things...

He *must* be handed over...

And he *must* be killed.

We see Jesus agonizing over this reality in the garden of Gethsemane:

“Father, take this cup from me.”

“I know that pain that lies ahead and I don't want it.”

“Yet not my will, but your will be done.” (14:36)

This has been the plan from the beginning.

The divine council—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—

Before all time—

Determined that God's people would be saved.

But this salvation could only come through the death of God the Son.

Jesus maintained his silence—

He didn't plead for his innocence—

Because it was the will of God that he would give his own life for his wayward people.

That he would pour out his blood for many.

And even in this story we see this pointed to:

Pilate gives the crowd the option to release one of the prisoners:

Either Jesus or Barabbas.

What Mark anticipates is that his Jewish readers will know what Barabbas' name means.

Son of (Bar) the father (abba).

Here is a man—son of the father—who is a convicted criminal...

Found guilty of insurrection...

And waiting for his just punishment to be handed out.

He's released, and in his place stands the true Son of the Father.

An innocent man, wrongfully charged with the same crime...

Being led to death for something he didn't do.

The Son of God, following through with the divine plan to secure the salvation and lives of all his people.

This is what Mark is pointing to in this passage...

This is where the road we've been walking this Lent leads to.

Jesus came and silently walked towards the ultimate suffering...

So that we might have life.

OUR PERSPECTIVE

This is our perspective:

We're convicted criminals...

Those who have turned away from God.

We've rebelled against his authority.

We'd like to believe that we're the ones in control of our own lives...

That we know what's best.

But the only thing we're capable of securing for ourselves is death...

And life without meaning.

The innocent one has come for us—

God came down from heaven and offered his life for us.

Our guilty lives for his innocent one.

And he calls us to respond.

We're called to believe that this is our reality.

That Jesus is the Son of God—the King—who gave his life for ours.

And we're called to worship the King and offer him our lives.

And this is what we're going to witness with these professions of faith...

The Spirit of God working in the hearts of his people...

Leading them to repentance and leading them to faith in Jesus Christ.

Let's sing a song of praise to our Lord and Savior as we prepare our hearts to respond to God's word.