

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT

The trials of Jesus, Tuesday of Holy Week

Welcome

Jesus is on trial, both before the high priest and before the Roman governor Pilate. The verdict in both cases is one of death. Pilate tries in his own way to save Jesus by offering to release one or other of Jesus or Barabbas. And yet the crowd choose to release the criminal Barabbas over against the innocent Jesus. Justice is turned on its head as it is also with the false witnesses who come before the high priest. Jesus who will one day be our judge is condemned by us to death.

Scripture Passage

Matthew 26: 57-66, 27: 11-26

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered.

But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end.

Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward.

At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"

The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?"

But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?"

They answered, "He deserves death."

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus said, "You say so."

But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.

Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?"

But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him."

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!"

Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Reflection

The charges against Jesus were trumped up. No two witnesses could agree that he had done anything wrong. But still the High Priest persisted. Why was it so important to him to have Jesus dead? There is an answer. Under Roman occupation, the Jews were stripped of all autonomy. No currency of their own, no foreign policy that wasn't the Roman one, and so all they had left of their national identity was their religion. A religion based around keeping the Law, and the sacrifices in the temple for the forgiveness of sins. And Jesus had built up a considerable public following saying that the Law was important, but the little details and regulations were man made, not from God, and telling people their sins were forgiven with no reference to the priests, sacrifice, or anything else except the grace of God. This undermined their priestly authority, and threatened their livelihoods.

Add to this the concern of those who owed their position and status, their jobs, to the Roman government. These are referred to as the Herodians, because Herod was no more than a puppet ruler, whose courtiers nevertheless had a very nice life, thank you. What if Jesus really *was* the Messiah, God's chosen one who would overthrow the oppressors? These people really believed they could thwart God's will by doing away with the Messiah. No revolution, their positions secure. *Better one man dies*, said the High Priest, *than the whole nation suffers*. So not a real trial at all, because Jesus was considered guilty before he entered the room.

Pontius Pilate probably wasn't a bad man. But he was a pragmatist. His job was to keep the locals, if not exactly happy, then at least quiet. His great fear was that a revolt would come to the attention of Emperor Tiberius (who *was* a bad man - as bad tempered as they come, too) and put *his* job in danger.

What did he see in this Jesus, brought to him before breakfast to be sentenced? He seems to have been impressed by Jesus' dignity. He wasn't railing against Roman rule like a real rebel might; he didn't answer any of the charges against him, and quietly spoke of *The Truth* - whatever that was.

Pilate did everything he could to avoid condemning Jesus to death - offering to free him under the Passover amnesty, suggesting that a good flogging might suffice - but eventually giving in to the demands of a noisy, worked-up crowd - the very riot he was desperate to avoid.

What do we take from this? Do we accept Jesus only as long as he doesn't interfere with our way of life, or our treasured customs and habits? Do we accept the forgiveness of our sins, but not share that forgiveness with other people, or wish God hadn't forgiven them either?

Pilate had difficult decisions to make - but they were only difficult because he was trying to cover his own back - eventually, doing the right thing was pushed aside in favour of doing the most convenient thing. We need to be careful of that. Doing right might be hard, but the consequences of our convenience might be disastrous.

Ron

Points for Prayers

- For courage to do what is right even when it is difficult
- Our own need both to forgive and be forgiven
- Thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers
- Prime Minister's health and for government
- Funerals needing to take place under new restrictions with only family mourners.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

We pray that 'we might live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us' (Ephesians 5:2)