

Sermon for the Lenten Service 6 (27 March 2015)

Greeting: Grace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come.
Amen.

• **The Reading for this Devotion is written in Mk 15, 1-20:**

- ^{ESV} 1 And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.
- 2 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so."
- 3 And the chief priests accused him of many things.
- 4 And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you."
- 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.
- 6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked.
- 7 And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas.
- 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them.
- 9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"
- 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.
- 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead.
- 12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?"
- 13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him."
- 14 And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him."
- 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.
- 16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion.
- 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.
- 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"
- 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.
- 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak

and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

• ***Dear Brothers and Sisters under the Cross of Christ!***

• Jesus was bound and delivered over, handed over to the Sanhedrin, the council of the Jews, then He would be handed over to Pontius Pilate, then He would be handed over to be crucified. Jesus is handed over ("dahingegeben" in German) into the hands of the sinners and they start to pass Him on until He is left to the judgement of the "ochlos" the mob. They then chose the genuine murderer Barrabas above Christ.

• The murderer escapes crucifixion whilst the righteous Son of Man, nobody could find anything against Him, is handed over to die.

• So just looking on the surface of things, we can immediately notice something. This case exposes that in the hands of the sinners there is no fair trial. Both, the religious council, the Sanhedrin, and the Roman court fail to judge according to their own laws. The laws are not the problem. It is the people in office who are corruptable. Interestingly enough, both corruptions are linked to the "ochlos" the mob. The highpriests used the mob, they stirred up the crowd to ask for the murderer to come free. They used the mob as a means to get what they wanted, namely to have Jesus crucified.

• And Pilate- one kind of feels sorry for him- he saw through all of this. He saw the jealousy, the envy of the chief priests. But in the end, he also was driven by his desire to please the mob, not, as it should be, to let fair judgement reign above all. He was clearly impressed by Jesus, especially when He remained silent, when they brought their many charges against Him. In a way he became Jesus' only advocate when he asked the mob, "*why, what evil has He done?*". But you cannot argue with an emotionally biased mob. They have no rational mind left. All they have is irrational and emotional shouting and crying out of slogans, "crucify him."

• So we have a complicated scenario: Jesus, Himself a Jew, is accused by His own people before the Roman emperor. But the Roman emperor takes Jesus' side, at least for a while, until he gives in to the desires of the crowd. In the end, of all the sinners, the Sanhedrin was the driving force behind Jesus' death

on the cross. And this is no anti-Semitic statement: There were Jews on both sides. It was the Jewish Sanhedrin against their own Jewish King Jesus! But all people involved, also Pilate, participated in the unjust judgement. He then even has Jesus whipped, by soldiers, and hands Him over to be crucified.

• On the other hand the real murderer comes free. He is released. This is very significant. So although all that happens is all unjust according to the Law, according to the Gospel everything that happens, every minute little detail proclaims the real meaning of what was happening according to God's will. According to the Law, this is a terrible mess, corruption and human failure written all over the words and actions of the sinners!

• But according to the Gospel, according to the Word of the Cross being our salvation, this is a wonderful sermon spelling out to us in every detail how the Lamb of God, who is the King of the Jews, the King of Israel, suffers and dies at the hand of sinners for us. He is handed over to corruption and death, so that the real murderers, in God's eyes, us real sinners, may be released from the judgement of the Law of God.

• If God was all about Law, this would have been a disaster. And there are many, even those who call themselves Christians, who interpret it as such. They reckoned this was God's mission gone wrong. They are right if God was all about Law.

• But God is not above all about Law, He is the Father of mercy. He is about Gospel and Grace above all. It is only when we hear this Word according to the Gospel that we see what was going on. For instance: Pilate asks Jesus, "you are the king of the Jews?" Jesus says, you said it. Pilate, that is a confession, you just said it.

• And then the soldiers, what were they saying mockingly, but what were their words whilst they saluted Him: "Hail, King of the Jews!" And then they fulfilled several prophecies when they were striking His head, spitting Him and striking Him. According to the Gospel, the Scriptures were being fulfilled. At a cost. On account of the Son of Man.

• They even put a purple cloak on Him, trying to be ironic, but in reality, they were crowning the real King of the Jews with the rightful colours. And where did all of this happen. Guess! Inside the palace (Mark puts in brackets, the governor's headquarters). The whole battalion was called for this crowning procedure. Finally they crowned Him with a real crown, of thorns, but it was a crown according to the Gospel. There the King of the Jews is crowned, officially- all actions and words necessary happened. It was all done in mockery, if you look from the sinners point of view, but according to the Gospel, here Jesus is crowned with a very a special and unusual crown which strangely enough suits the very special and unusual suffering and dying Saviour King of Israel! This passage ends by the soldiers leading Jesus to His throne, His very special throne, being lifted up on the cross.

• So Jesus' words were being fulfilled [Mk 10,33-34]: *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."*

• According to the Law, this was an unjust trial against Jesus. According to the Gospel of God the Scriptures were being fulfilled for the salvation of the sinners. Now, even the fact that according to the law Jesus was trialed unjustly, even this fits into the Gospel perfectly: The unblemished Lamb is sacrificed for the sinners.

• So we see how God in His wisdom and His great compassion for us allowed everything to play itself out to accomplish the fulfilment of the Gospel, the Word of Cross. This means great comfort for all of us. There is no need to be afraid. Even the worst corruption or most evil of powers cannot take the Gospel, God's mercy and Grace away from us. He rules! Glory be to Jesus! **Amen.**

• *The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*