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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
March 20, 2024  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday Midweek Lent

Responsive Reading: Isaiah 53:10-12

Passion History: Jesus Is Crucified

Hymns: 390; 156; 143:1-5; 47

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:15-22

<sup>15</sup> Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. <sup>16</sup> And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" <sup>18</sup> For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

<sup>19</sup> While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."

<sup>20</sup> But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

They said, "Barabbas!"

<sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

*They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" (NKJV)*

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Choices!

Life is full of choices. Many of them we may regard as being inconsequential to how our lives turn out. We may think of some choices as consequential because they have such a lasting impact, “What am I doing for a living?” “Where am I going to live?” “Who am I going marry?” “Are we going to have children?”

Other choices we make may actually have as long an impact; we just don’t realize it at the time, or at least take the time to consider the consequences of some of our choices. When many people make the same choice, one may be fooled into thinking a poor choice is in fact a wise choice. “What food should I eat?” “Should I borrow the money to buy this really neat TV?” “Should I get the new I-phone everyone is raving about?” These choices are easily influenced by society and advertising. Some people point out that the cumulative impact of our hundreds of daily small choices may be greater than some we perceive to be the important choices in life.

Choices may leave us in a quandary, wondering how we got into this mess, or an unfortunate circumstance, and what one ought to do with the choice it then leaves us. That is where Pontius Pilate found himself after he chose to give the Jews a choice on that early Friday morning. When they didn’t make the choice Pilate had anticipated he was left with our searching question for this evening:

### **THEME: What then Shall I Do with Jesus?**

Let us consider the impact of that question as it was addressed by two significantly different parties involved in the events of that first Good Friday. Consider

#### **I. The Choice and Its Result.**

First, let us look at the people’s choice. Our text tells us that Pilate was aware that it was really a matter of the Jewish rulers being jealous of Jesus’ following that caused Jesus to be brought in front of him with what were obviously trumped-up charges and false allegations. Pilate had not found any fault in Jesus. But since the situation seemed to be getting out of hand, Pilate hoped to find a way out by using the Passover custom of releasing a prisoner. His scheme was to give the people a choice between Jesus, who was good and had helped so many people, and a notorious criminal named Barabbas. The choice must have seemed so obvious to Pilate that he couldn’t imagine the people making the wrong choice. With coaxing and

coaching from the chief priests and elders the crowd was brought around and in a mob mentality. When it was time to announce the people's choice, well we know how they all cried out together just as they had been coached. They called out for Barabbas to be released. A murderer, a rebel, a dangerous criminal was set free upon society. How is it possible for such a choice to be made?

Choices. Bad choices. People have made bad choices since Adam and Eve took of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. People still do so yet today. What is even more tragic is that spiritual choices with eternal consequences are made by people that will lead them down the path that leads to their eternal destruction. How is it possible for people to make such horrible choices? How can people, again and again, make the "Barabbas" choice, that is chose evil over good, preferring the world, preferring sin over righteousness?

This reveals the depravity of natural man. This reveals the true spiritual state of humanity. This reveals where we also were by nature. When the choice is set before the unregenerate, well, people are able to make the wrong choice, the way of false righteousness and sin, and people by nature can only fail to choose Christ. This reveals the desperate need for divine intervention in our spiritual choices.

So, Pilate put our searching question before the people, "*What then shall I do with Jesus?*" They despised and rejected Jesus, calling out together, "*Let Him be crucified!*" (v.22)

This choice was also made by another on that fateful day. The choice between Jesus and sinner was also made by God the Father. Yes, the choice was far broader than choosing one sinner or one innocent Man. God made a choice on that first Good Friday between Jesus and all the sinners of this world. All the people of this world were to be condemned, not just to the torments of the cross but to the torments of hell, condemned to such torments for all eternity. There was no question about the guilt of the condemned. There was no question concerning the appropriateness of the punishment. It was all about the significance of the Passover bringing deliverance from death. God asked the question posed by Pilate in our text, "*Whom do you want me to release to you?*" (v.17) And God answered the question, choosing Barabbas, a notorious criminal who deserved the death penalty. That leads us to the searching question of our text: "*What then shall I do with Jesus?*" The final answer given by God Himself

regarding His own Beloved Son, the innocent, the just, the loving Son of God, the final answer was, “*Let Him be crucified!*” (v.22) -- God the Father said,

## **II. Crucify Him!**

With God Jesus was not despised, but He was forsaken. Jesus was the substitutionary sacrifice that shed His blood for the salvation of sinners. God chose to have Jesus crucified so that sinners like Barabbas could be set free. God chose to have Jesus crucified so that sinners like us could be set free of guilt and condemnation. The law was satisfied, and by God’s grace and mercy we have been pardoned and set free from sin’s curse of death and hell.

Now as regenerate children of God, with the Holy Spirit working in our hearts through this gospel of God’s love and forgiveness, we have the choice set before us every day. Life is all about choices, and by the Spirit’s power we are enabled to make the right choices. So, consider again our searching question as it applies to us in our individual hearts and lives, “*What then shall I do with Jesus?*”

## **III. Choose Jesus!**

Yes, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we do choose Jesus. We see Him and know Him as our Redeemer Lord. We put our trust in Him for forgiveness of sins, and righteousness, and life. We turn to Him for help in time of need. We find in Him our peace and hope for everlasting life. Jesus went to the cross looking like a guilty condemned criminal, and we love Him for it. We are now called by God to follow Him, to take up our cross, to deny ourselves with all our sinful passions, and follow Jesus. What comes of this choice? Some in this world would say “A miserable life of denial and frustration.” But the truth of the matter is that by this choice of faith we lay hold on eternal life, and the glories which Christ secured for us because He was crucified.

It is as we sang in our opening hymn this evening:

*“Drawn to the Cross, which Thou has blest  
With healing gifts for souls distressed,  
To find in Thee my life, my rest,  
Christ Crucified, I come.”* (The Lutheran Hymnal 390:1)

**AMEN.**

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.