

## *Your Substitute*

Mark 15:6-20

April 10, 2022

Say Substitute. We all know what a substitute is, right? A substitute teacher stands in for the one that is normally there. A substitute preacher does the same. A substitute bus driver or cook or whatever takes the place of someone else. In the Civil War, if you were drafted and didn't want to fight, and if you had about \$3,000, you could hire a substitute to fight in your place. The price varied, but estimates are that there were anywhere from 50-150,000 substitute soldiers in the Confederate Army. Wouldn't it be great if you were able to get a substitute to pay your taxes? Or to have your surgery? Wouldn't it be awesome to have a sub lay in for you for your next colonoscopy? And drink the junk beforehand. Obviously there are some things you can't hire a substitute for no matter how much money you have. If you are able, please stand as we read about the greatest Substitute of all. Mark 15:6-20

6 Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

13 "Crucify him!" they shouted.

14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

15 Wanting to **satisfy** the **crowd**, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Because of our sermon series on Stewardship, we haven't been preaching on the events leading up to Holy Week. We've done that many times and you are very familiar with those I trust. I've also been sharing those lessons with our BLAST kids on Wednesday nights and this past Wednesday, we got Jesus crucified and buried. We'll check on Him the next Wednesday we're back, God willing. Today, however, as we especially reflect on this holy time, we want to linger over the events of Jesus' last few hours and ponder what they may mean for us today. As I've said many times, I fear that we rush to the empty tomb on Easter Sunday without stopping at the cross to mourn and weep. Praise God for the empty tomb, but before it was empty, it was full. And before that there was a cross. And before the cross an arrest, a trial, and torture. Let's reflect on this a little today as we prepare to observe Holy Communion and as we enter into this Holy Week.

About a week or so before this took place, Jesus raised a man named Lazarus from the dead. Five days before this Jesus entered the city riding on a donkey to shouts of Hosanna, Hail the King, and the like. But on Monday He cleared the temple and even though He was very popular with the masses, the powers that be were already scheming to take Him out. They just didn't know how or when.

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Jesus preached about His return and how we are to be ever ready. On Thursday night, He gathered in the Upper Room with His 12 closest friends to celebrate the Passover Feast and share one last night with them. We will reenact that event in just a little while. But after sharing the meal, the bread, the cup and a hymn, they left the upper room and traveled across the city and across the Kidron Valley to the Garden called Gethsemane where Jesus prayed while His disciples slept. Three times He returned to check on them only to find them fast asleep each time.

They were forced awake pretty quickly, however, when the Temple guards arrived with their swords and torches to arrest Jesus, led by one of their own, Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Master with a kiss. After a futile attempt to fight back, Jesus' closest friends **all** deserted Him and fled into the night like scarred rabbits from a family of coyotes. And Jesus was led away alone to endure several illegal and unfair trials before finally ending up before Pilate for the last time.

Historians tell us that Pontius Pilate was a ruthless ruler but he apparently had some sense of justice. He knew in his heart that Jesus was innocent and his own wife had been warned in a dream to steer clear of Him. He tried. Somewhere along the years, the Romans developed a practice of releasing a Jewish prisoner at Passover who the Jews requested. This would be Pilate's out, he thought. He'd turn Jesus loose and all could be well. But it was not to be.

In verse 7 we're introduced to a very intriguing character. Say Barabbas. He's mentioned only briefly in each of the Gospels and nowhere else in history. This passage tells us that he was an insurrectionist which means he plotted overthrow of the Roman government. Luke calls it rebellion but it's the same thing. That's a pretty serious crime. Romans didn't take to it kindly and violators were not only prosecuted, they were executed. In his zeal to overthrow he had committed murder. Perhaps a soldier or maybe he had assassinated a Roman official. He was very well known not only to Pilate but to all the people for Matthew says he was notorious. He was a famous prisoner. Everyone knew about Barabbas like Al Capone or Machine Gun Kelly. Barabbas was a popular hero among the Jews because he dared stand up to Rome. But he had been caught and imprisoned and was now awaiting his execution planned for later that day.

But his plans and his life and perhaps even his eternity got changed that morning. Literally on his way down the hall to his electric chair, or in this case, his cross, he got stopped. Outside the crowd is demanding that Pilate do what he customarily does

and set one of their own free. “Ok,” he says, “How about your king? The one who rode the donkey in here on Sunday? The one called Jesus?” And perhaps they would have gone with that, but the chief priests, of all people, the ones who are supposed to be the most just, most fair and most righteous, torpedo that. Instead of it being Pilate’s chance to get out of a unjust bind, it’s their chance to get rid of their chief adversary. They stirred up the crowd and, by the way, the crowd **allowed** themselves to be stirred up. Beware of mob mentality. There’s usually always an instigator with a motive you probably know nothing about in the background stirring things up. Beware of being played.

“No, we don’t want Jesus. We want Barabbas. We want Barabbas.” “Well then, what shall I do with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked. And manipulated once again by the priests, they shouted back, "Crucify him!" When Pilate tried to talk sense and justice, they shouted even louder, "Crucify him!" Luke says their shouts prevailed.

Verse 15 “Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.” Here we have the strongest temptation for every leader. Wanting to satisfy the crowd. We all want people to like us. We don’t want to be hated or for people to leave or oppose us, so we satisfy the crowd. And he released a guilty rebellious murderer named Barabbas and sent Jesus to the cross. Matthew tells us that Pilate then washed his hands to declare his innocence in Jesus’ death to which the crowd responded, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” Let it be on us indeed.

So that’s really all we know about Barabbas. We don’t know how old he was or what he worked at. We don’t know where he was born or lived and we don’t know his marital status. We don’t know if he knew Jesus or not. He literally could be **any** of us. In fact, he is **each** of us. His name means son of the father. Obviously, right? Perhaps that’s like Jr in those days. He was like his dad. And his greatest grandad, Adam. The one who committed rebellion and insurrection in the a place called Eden. Son of the father. Barabbas.

Just as Jesus took Barabbas’ place on that cross, He also took Adams and yours and mine. We are all Barabbas. Our rap sheet might include different sins than his, but we all have our own long list for which we are guilty. We all deserve to be tortured and die and go to hell for what we’ve knowingly done, not to mention what we’re not even aware of. But Jesus **volunteered** to be our substitute. He stepped into our place. Jesus began to be flogged, excruciating pain, horrible torture that really belonged to Barabbas and to us. Did Barabbas stand afar off and watch as his substitute suffered in his place? My guess is he didn’t. My guess is he ran for the hills before Pilate changed his mind and to plot his next attack. But he could have watched. I think we should watch so

that we might appreciate all that our Substitute did for us. That's why we should come to the Love Feast today and Good Friday service this week.

Look at the next few verses. 16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him." It's important of us to watch what our substitute suffered for us.

All of this should have happened to Barabbas. The crown of thorns, the spit, the beating, the mocking, the nails and the spear. Jesus deserved NONE of it. Barabbas deserved it all. We deserve it all. It all belonged to him. And to us. But Barabbas had a substitute stand in for him that day and pay for his sin and take his punishment and torture and abuse and death. And so do we. If we will accept Him.

Looking ahead nearly 800 years, God, through Isaiah prophesied this about that day, "...his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness — ...Isa 53:3-6 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up **our** infirmities and carried **our** sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for **our** transgressions, he was crushed for **our** iniquities; the punishment that brought **us** peace was upon him, and by his wounds **we are healed**. 6 **We all**, like sheep, have gone astray, **each of us** has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity **of us all**." We all like Barabbas, have gone astray. Each of us rebelled against God. Our own insurrection against our Creator. And Jesus stepped in to take our punishment and our sin that we might have peace and that we might be healed.

What did Barabbas do after that? Did he, as Peter says many do, return to his sin as a dog to its vomit? Did he continue to rebel and plot and kill? Or did he become a follower. We do not know. Certainly, you would hope that he turned from his sin. That this new lease on life, this fresh start, this Divine intervention was not without effect. But sadly, it could well have been. Too often I've seen people in similar situations whom God has healed or freed or delivered from hopeless situations get up and walk away from Him and return to their sin like a dog to its vomit. What will **you** do knowing that Jesus took your place, your flogging, your punishment, your cross?

Whenever somebody subbed for me at school, I always tried to thank them when I could. They took my punishment for that day 😊. But they also got paid for it. Jesus not

only took all my punishment, He also did it all at His own expense. I had nothing to offer Him but my sin and my heartache and neither do you. He didn't get \$3000 or anything else. His motivation was not money or fame. It was and is love. He took our place because He loves you and wanted to save you not just from torture and a miserable death, but from an eternal death in hell.

And so I want to challenge us to do four things before we finish today. 1. I want to challenge you to look into Barabbas' face and see your own. For you are he. Realize the seriousness and hopelessness of your condition and the enormous gift that Jesus gave you as well as the enormous cost. 2. I challenge you to take some time this week to read, to remember, and to reflect on what exactly Jesus did for you. The pain He endured, the agony He experienced, and the death He died in your place. 3. I challenge you to accept Jesus' substitutionary death. Barabbas had no problem doing that but many people do today. For whatever reason, they resist and refuse this greatest gift ever offered. Don't make that eternal mistake. There is no other substitute and if you don't accept what Jesus did for you, you will suffer eternally in hell. Let His blood be on you. And 4. I challenge you, having received this gift to thank, worship, glorify, obey and serve the One who took your place, your Substitute! Let pure worship flow out of your heart as you ponder what He did for you. Let praise and thanksgiving flow from your lips in prayer and in song. And obey Him faithfully. Instead of getting up and going on like nothing ever happened, let us follow and serve Him each moment that remains in our lives.

## Barabbas's Story

George Bowers, 11/2007

I had murdered. Was caught and tried.  
Condemned and to be crucified.  
When just that moment through the gate,  
Stepped one Man who changed my fate.  
He came along and just in time,  
Though He'd committed not a crime.  
Pilate tried to let Him go,  
But all the Jews cried loudly, "NO!"  
Instead they wanted me released,  
When Pilate agreed, their shouting ceased.  
He got my stripes, my cross, my grief,  
While undeserved, I felt relief.  
And as we passed I caught His eye,  
This man that for me would surely die.  
Instead of hatred, I saw love,  
And knew this Man was from above.

Somehow I think He died for all  
Who'll answer when they hear Him call.  
Not just my sin, but for yours as well,  
He saved us all from burning Hell.  
He took your place, stood in your stead,  
And wore your thorns upon His head.  
That fateful day He suffered loss  
He took up every sinner's cross.  
Now in the end I was set free  
And Jesus Christ died there for me.  
I watched the pain on Jesus' face  
As He was nailed there in my place.  
I don't think yet I understand  
But I shall never forget that Man.  
Should I go out and kill again?  
And double up my filthy sin?  
No I will change and live my life  
For the one who ransomed me from strife!  
I hope you'll choose this Savior too  
For He has also died for you!