

## Sermon for April 6th, 2014

### Fifth Sunday in Lent, John 19:1-16

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Over the last 5 weeks we have been hearing about how these **40 days** of the Lenten Season are a time for us to face together the brokenness of our lives and the world, and then **turn** that brokenness over to Jesus Christ so that we can be **restored by him** through His death and resurrection.

In the **first** week we heard about the *broken vessel* and how we humans are broken and flawed vessels which Jesus came to earth to redeem. In the **second** week we heard about *broken trust* and how in our world today trust is not always something which is easy to come by. The **third** week we heard about *broken bread* and how because of Jesus coming to earth as “*the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*” God’s glory was revealed through the sacrament of Holy Communion. **Last** week we heard about *broken promises* and how broken promises can break down the strongest of relationships. **Today**, our last Sunday before we celebrate Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we hear about our final topic—*broken justice*. Broken justice is the culmination of the story of Jesus’ journey to the cross.

In our world today we do not have to look too far nor listen too hard to hear stories of *broken justice* and **because** of this *broken justice* lives are shattered or destroyed. We hear about it every day in the news. **Sin abounds** in our world and because of our weakness and vulnerability to sin we are a people in **need** of restoration, renewal, and reconciliation with God. We are **held captive** to sin in many varieties—fear, anxiety, social injustice, greed, violence, and so many more. Lent gives us **new hope** to overcome the power of *broken justice* in the world **even** as that hope comes to us through the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How many of you have heard the term ‘*scapegoat*’? How many of you knew that it originated from a **biblical** story? For those of you who may not know the word, the **definition** of a ‘scapegoat’ is: *a person (or as in the case of our story— an animal) or group that is forced to take the blame for happenings that are not their fault.* This morning in our **first** reading from the Old Testament book of Leviticus we heard how the term came about. The scapegoat, which was actually a goat, was burdened with the sins of many. These sins were put upon the **head** of the animal and it was set out into the wilderness to be set free or whatever fate might fall upon it. The key was that all the sins of the people would have been put on that **one goat** thereby freeing the people of their sins. I guess that is **one**

way to atone for one's sins; although, that is **not really** how it works for us in our world today.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians Paul talked about everything becoming new because of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. All the **old** has passed away, God is **bringing the world** to himself and **establishing** a close relationship with us—not counting our sins or trespasses. **All** this is done for our sake through Jesus Christ—the one who **died** on the cross for us, the one who **knew no sin**, in order that **because of Him** we might be made right with God through **justice** as ambassadors for Jesus.

I do not **know** about you, but **this** is what makes Jesus' death on the cross so much more incredible!! **Even after** what was done to Jesus God still wants us to be in relationship with us, He **still** wants us to be made right as His children, God is making his appeal through us to the rest of the world. How **awesome** of a God do we have? His one and only Son died a **painful, humiliating** death on the cross, at the hands of the **same** people who on just the Sunday before were **praising** him and **giving** him honor. The next week they were yelling, "*Crucify him.*" **Where** is the justice in that? Broken justice to be sure.

**Now** we come to *broken justice* of the highest degree. As a bit of background on Pontius Pilate—he was the governor of Judea from 26-36 C.E., he was appointed by the Roman emperor, he was assigned to collect taxes, to oversee

building projects, and to keep law and order—even though he maintained peace through brute force. Pilate hung worship images of Caesar throughout Jerusalem—which **upset** the Jews, he had coins bearing pagan religious symbols minted—which **upset** the Jews, he had an aqueduct built with money from the temple treasury—which **upset** the Jews, and there were numerous riots by the Jews against Pilate’s cruelty during his reign as governor in Jerusalem. Hence, Pilate was skating on thin ice with Rome **because** of all these problems. Pilate **could not afford** another riot—especially at Passover with hundreds of thousands of Jews in the city. When Jesus was brought before him—Pilate was in a difficult position.

*Broken justice.*

Here is what our gospel reading from John comes down to. **Because** of Pilate being ‘*more afraid than ever*’ he told the Jews **2** times, “*I find no case against him.*” And **1** time we read, “*From then on Pilate tried to release him.*” Pilate wanted **nothing** to do with this decision. He wanted to **let Jesus go**. Pilate thought if he **flogged** Jesus the Jews would accept the beating as sufficient punishment. But it **did not** work. You see, the Jews knew they had **no** power, **no** authority, and **no** jurisdiction to have Jesus crucified. That decision was up to the Roman governor. Pilate was the **only one** who could have Jesus put to death.

The **climax** of this story is when Pilate brought Jesus outside. Pilate sat on the **judge’s bench**—justice being done. He **said** to the Jews, “*Here is your King*

(capital 'K').” They cried out, “*Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!*” Pilate asked them, “*Shall I crucify your King (capital 'K' again)?*” The **chief priests** answered, “*We have no king (small 'k') but the emperor.*” Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

Here is the **real tragedy** in this story for the gospel writer and for us as we read this story in retrospect. In **rejecting** Jesus as king, the Jewish leadership at the same time **reject God** as king and are therefore **judged** themselves. Those who reject the offer of God in Jesus are by definition judged because they have **closed themselves off from God**. They were **offered salvation** and **invited into the presence** of God but chose to condemn Jesus instead. The Jews **rejection** of Jesus is tragic because they have lost everything. For John the Jews’ loss of their relationship with God was as devastating as Jesus’ death on the cross.

**Everything** is at stake in the decision one makes about the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Today we know that those who come to God through Jesus are **not** judged, but come to **eternal** life. Through Jesus’ death on the cross He took our sins upon himself. And through that act we were made right with God. Because of Jesus’ mighty act of mercy—justice was done. The *broken justice* was made right. God’s one and only Son died for us and **because** of that we need to recognize that “*Our King (big 'k')*” was the **loving** shepherd, the **witnessing** judge, ‘*the Word which had become flesh*’, the One who **did not hesitate** to lay down his life for

those he loved **was not defeated**. His death and resurrection means glory for us all  
**through** Almighty God. *Broken justice* restored for one and all through our Lord  
and Savior, Jesus Christ. All thanks be to God. **AMEN.**