

From Hero to Zero

Sixth Sunday in Lent (Palm Sunday)

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It is interesting to note that at the end of some programmes on television, you will read the following disclaimer - This work is fictional and any resemblance to persons living or deceased is purely co-incidental. So good are the story tellers these days that much of what we see is believable and we need to remind ourselves that it is not real.

On the contrary, the events we remember during this week are real. They are not story for our entertainment or our edification - they are a real event recounted by four credible witnesses. There is a very real danger that as we hear of them yet again, that we will continue to think of them in terms of a nice story and overlook the true impact.

It is a worthwhile exercise as we continue on through this week, to make the Journey alongside Jesus, to make a reality of these things and to take time to contemplate what it is that they mean in our lives. This is the purpose of the traditional worship pattern over Holy Week, that we might journey with Jesus.

The events of Gospel this morning - the Passion, are the true focus of our faith and coupled with the first Gospel - read in the hall, we have a wonderful contrast of process. Jesus the hero in five short days became Jesus the zero. The popularity of Palm Sunday was gone by the Friday.

Over the years, I am sure you have heard this story and many different preachers explaining it. Today, I want you to take a moment to look at the part of the story that contains Barabbas. He was the man that was set free, while Jesus took his place on the Cross, He lived though he deserved to die, while the one who died deserved to live. He was bad and set free, while the one who was good was punished.

This is what Paul describes as Grace. Unmerited pardon, because Jesus takes our place, our punishment. But there is something more. Barabbas is not an accidental name. In Aramaic, it literally means Son of the Father or Child of the Father. There is one universal truth here - That each of us is a child of a father. Each of us can be described as Bar - Abbas.

And this is the reality - Each of us stand in Barabbas' shoes and each of us have the offer of freedom from the Son of the Father with a capital letter.

In 1961, Antony Quinn starred in a film simply entitled Barabbas, The author explored the effect of the freedom granted on the man who could clearly recognise the fact that Jesus had died for him. It is an interesting exploration, for he tried to return to his old ways and could not and in the ensuing story was constantly confronted by the fact - Jesus died for me! In the end, the internal battle ended and he found faith in the true Son of the Father.

But what of you - Barabbas and me Barabbas. The story of the film is fictional, but the issue is real. Faith is coming to terms with the understanding that Jesus died for me! Our sins might not be insurrection or murder but we are nevertheless all sinners and deserve the fate that Jesus took on our behalf.

Like Barabbas we have a new found freedom and we may choose the outcome - to accept the results of what Jesus' death gives, or to reject them, but there is a choice which we all must make. We must say that he died for me - or that he didn't but the choice is yours and mine. When we reflect on the Cross on Friday, we must acknowledge our part in his death.

That is why I love the traditions of this day - We gather and cheer in the beginning, but at the trial we say - Crucify Him and we call for the release of Barabbas. (In reality, we are calling for our release.) We are caught out by our own self interest

Jesus did not go from hero to zero - Jesus is the same Yesterday, Today and Forever. No we are the ones who abandon him- even though he did not abandon us.

In your idle moments this week, put yourself into the story as Barabbas and think of what it was that you gained. Have you responded? Or are you sitting back failing to get involved? Faith only works when you exercise it - Let us together be mindful of the gift of life.

AMEN