

Thought for the Day Maundy Thursday, April 6th
“Are you the King of the Jews?”
Matthew 27:1-30



“Then Pilate released Barabbas for them. He had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified” (verse 26).

As the story of Jesus’s crucifixion moves towards its climax, pulling more and more characters and questions into its wake, there now emerges one of its central themes. When Jesus dies, Barabbas goes free.

The question of Jesus' status comes up in the questioning before Pilate. Is he a King and if so what sort of King is he? This question bores Pilate although the religious authorities are exercised by it. It's central to their case of heresy against Jesus. In the freeing of Barabbas there is an unlikely answer to the question. What sort of King is Jesus? And how does he show his authority? Not in any way that most people do.

At this point of the trial it just so happened that Barabbas was in prison - a notoriously violent rebel leader. Whatever Barabbas had done, by the end of the passage, it's clear what his significance is. Barabbas represents all of us. When Jesus is sentenced to die, the brigand goes free and in some way we all go free.

For Matthew everyone in the account is guilty of the judicial murder of Jesus - the chief priests and elders who have handed him over, Pilate in his weakness and ultimate disinterest and the crowds themselves. As all are implicated and therefore guilty so redemption is offered to all. When Jesus died as King of the Jews, he drew on to himself the

sins of all.

All through the story there are voices whispering that Jesus is innocent. Even the wife of Pilate has picked up on this and tries to intervene to warn her husband not to send Jesus to his death.

Jesus' innocence is key to Matthew's meaning in all this. It is contrasted with the guilt and shame that is all around in everyone else. Peter has disappeared to the margins, Judas has been the dupe of the authorities, the chief priests and other leaders have done their worst, the crowds have implicated themselves, the Roman legal system has failed Jesus and all around is guilt and hypocrisy. All the human systems have fallen short.

But Jesus' innocence of the charges laid against him is what Matthew wants us to understand here. His great Passover action makes a way through the Red Sea of sin and death, inviting Barabbas and all of us to walk through to freedom.

Lord of the Cross, touch our hearts once more, the hearts of all humanity. In your forsakenness, call us back. Breathe your breath into our lives. Work in us

**the freedom that we cannot find for ourselves.
Amen**

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