

Reversals

Mark 15:1-20

Lent 4, March 14, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

When things finally come to Pontius Pilate everything is backward.

Pilate should be the one who stands in front of Jesus. Jesus is after all Lord of all the earth. Pilate is the pipsqueak governor of Judea. He serves at the pleasure of the emperor and will not serve that long.

Pilate questions Jesus. It should be Jesus who questions Pilate.

And yet when Pilate questions Jesus, He asks Jesus the most relevant question of His career. Jesus is the King of the Jews. That is to say that He is the King of Israel. Jesus is the heir of David. He is the One who will make David's throne an everlasting one. When Pilate asks Jesus that question Jesus has the opportunity to answer. He tells Pilate that Pilate has said so which means that unless Pilate is a liar, Jesus is the King of the Jews. Admitting that He is the King of the Jews will condemn Jesus under Roman Law. It gives Pilate the necessary excuse in case he should have to crucify Him. Even though Pilate is asking the question when Pilate does ask the question Jesus gets exactly what He wants.

The chief priests accuse Jesus of many things. It should be Jesus who accuses them of many things.

Jesus had already accused them of many things. He had accused them of self righteousness. He had accused them of lacking the necessary righteousness to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He had called them whitewashed tombs, clean on the outside and unclean on the inside filled with death. He had accused them of tying up large burdens and placing them on people and not helping them to lift them with even a finger. He had accused them of making people twice as much a child of hell as they were. He had accused them of closing the Kingdom of God in people's faces. He had accused them of their lack of repentance before John the Baptist.

Jesus had accused them plenty and even though He pronounced woe upon them, He had not yet sentenced them to death. And here they were fulfilling their hypocrisy by condemning Him to death and even though it is the exact opposite of the way that it should be, when it is the opposite of the way that it should be Jesus is getting His way.

Pilate should have released Jesus and sentenced Barabbas to crucifixion. If Pilate had any ounce of justice in him, he should have released Jesus and executed Barabbas. Barabbas was the one who was guilty of murder. Murder is a capital crime. It deserves death. Ever since Genesis nine God had decreed that men may put to death the one who sheds the blood of man. Pilate is the legitimate authority. He is the state whom God had instituted to govern Judea. He had the right, yea the calling from God, to put Barabbas to death and release Jesus. Jesus had never murdered anyone. He had never done anything that deserved capital punishment. Pilate should have released Jesus and crucified Barabbas. Instead under pressure from the crowd and fearing for his own position, Pilate releases Barabbas and sentences Jesus to crucifixion. And when Jesus is sentenced to crucifixion even though it is the opposite of the way that it should be, Jesus is gets exactly what He wants.

The crowd should have answered to Jesus. The crowd should have been at the mercy of Jesus. How many times had a crowd been at the mercy of Jesus? How many crowds followed Him around during His ministry filled with the sick, the lame, the blind, the lepers, the deaf and the demon possessed? How many times had Jesus in spite of His weariness taken the time to heal the sick and purify the lepers? How many times had Jesus cast out demons? How many times had Jesus tried to get away from the crowds so that He could have some quiet time either by Himself or with His disciples? The

crowds came and they came and they came and He always had compassion on them. Twice the crowds found themselves in a wilderness place with Jesus but without any food. They would have fainted. They would have gone hungry. They should have gone into the towns to buy bread for themselves. Instead Jesus fed them. The crowds followed Him because He filled their bellies and Jesus dismissed them with His blessing. The crowds were doing exactly what they should have been doing on Palm Sunday when they shouted, "Hosanna, to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" He had their acclamation and He deserved it. Look at everything that He had done for them. He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

And now He is before Pontius Pilate. Everything is backward from the way that it should be. Instead of the crowds standing before Jesus, Jesus stands before the crowd. Instead of the crowd being at His mercy, He is at theirs. Instead of blessing Him as the crowd should have done, they condemn Him to crucifixion. It is exactly the opposite of what Pontius Pilate was hoping would happen. He was trying to put His decision off onto the crowd hoping that they would find Him innocent. After all how many times did the chief priests not lay a hand on Him because they feared the crowds? Pilate even calls Jesus the king of Jews hoping that if he called Him their king they might just release Him. After all Pilate knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests handed him over. There was no love lost between Pilate and the chief priests. Perhaps Pilate could force the chief priests to let Jesus go if the crowds asked for His release. He had done so much for them. Perhaps they would demand His release especially if Pilate reminded them that He is their king.

But they did not. They went along with the chief priests. And while it is likely that the composition of this crowd was not the same people as the crowds who had received so much from Him nevertheless it is true that the crowd should have been at His mercy receiving gifts from Him. Instead He was at their mercy receiving a death sentence from them. And yet when things are the opposite of the way that they should be, Jesus is getting His way.

Jesus should have handed Pilate over to justice. Pilate was perverting justice to have Jesus put to death. Pilate was condemning an innocent man. He was probably doing it for political expediency, but that only makes Pilate's crime even worse. Jesus is the king who will judge the living and the dead. Even Pilate will stand in front of Him and answer for his sins. But now that is not the case. Pilate is the one who is handing Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate should be at the mercy of Jesus. Instead Jesus is at the mercy of Pilate. Jesus should be handing Pilate over for his sins. Instead Pilate is handing Jesus over to death. And when things are the opposite of the way that they should be, Jesus is getting exactly what He wants.

The soldiers are mocking Jesus. They are ridiculing Him. They put a purple robe on Jesus. Purple robes were worn only by royalty in the ancient world and by those who were extremely rich. The purple dye used to make purple cloth in the ancient world was extremely hard to come by and so only those who could afford to wear such apparel wore it. If you went around in the ancient world wearing purple people would assume that you were royalty or that you were rich. It is not much different today. Studies have shown that people who dress up get paid more because the people paying them assume that if they are dressed up, they deserve more.

They put the purple robe on Jesus in ridicule. They do not think that He is a king or a rich man. They believe that Jesus believes that He is a king. In order to prove to Him that He is not a king, they are going to put a sign of royalty on Him which they think that He does not deserve. But Jesus does deserve it. He is wearing exactly what He should be wearing. They intended it for ridicule, but instead it confesses exactly what is going on.

It should not convey that He is a king, because it is done in mockery. But it does convey that He is a king. In spite of His coming death, He is a king. In fact it is because of His coming death that He is becoming a king. Exactly the opposite of what the soldiers intended has come to pass, and when exactly the opposite is happening of what should be happening, Jesus is having His way.

They put a crown of thorns on His head. It is supposed to be method of torture. When was the last time you were poked by a thorn? Did it draw blood? Imagine having them poke your head all around. Think of the blood that was drawn from our Lord just from having this torture device pressed upon His head. It is supposed to be a torture device, but they made it a crown!

Again the soldiers intend ridicule. They intend that the crown of thorns add to our Lord's torture by being something that it is not. It should be a sign of His royalty. Instead it is an instrument of His torture. They intend it to be another object of ridicule. Instead it confesses His royalty for it is only in wearing a thorny crown, and no other crown would do, that Jesus becomes truly the King of the Jews. And when the opposite of what is intended is happening, Jesus is having His way.

The same is true when they bow before Him. The same is true when they say, "Hail, King of the Jews." They are exposing how powerless Jesus is. They are acclaiming power to Him all the while knowing that they will kill Him. But by so acclaiming that He has no power they are confessing the power that He has. For it is only in His death that He will be king of the Jews and even we Gentiles will hail Him as our king also. It is only by bowing to Him in mockery that people will kneel before Him for all time and eternity and acclaim Him. It is the opposite of what it should be. But when it is the opposite of what it should be Jesus is getting what He wants.

It should have been you on the cross.

It should have been you who cried out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It should have been you who hung their suffered all of eternity of all of hell for the things that you have done. For living out of fellowship of God it should have been you who died on that cross.

It would have served God's own justice for you to have died there. God's justice demand that you die there. Anyone who does continue in the law to do what the law requires shall die by the law. Even in the eyes of God Himself it is only right that you die there.

And yet Jesus dies there instead. He did not deserve to die there. He always lived in fellowship with God. He always did God's Law. He kept the law in its entirety. He should have lived. You should have died. And exactly the opposite has happened.

And when exactly the opposite happens of what should have happened, Jesus is having His way.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.