

## One for All!

Sermon for Good Friday – Luke 23:13-25



*“<sup>13</sup>Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup>and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. <sup>15</sup>Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. <sup>16</sup>I will therefore punish and release him.” <sup>18</sup>But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— <sup>19</sup>a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. <sup>20</sup>Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, <sup>21</sup>but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” <sup>22</sup>A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” <sup>23</sup>But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup>So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup>He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.”*

One for all! That’s the theme of Good Friday. Only One can bear the sins of the whole world in Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross. Jesus has no teammates, helpers, or advisors standing by His side. Jesus does this alone. All by Himself. Yet His sacrifice on the cross is so powerful and far-reaching that it not only reaches Himself and His friends, not only His countrymen and contemporaries, but everyone! Truly, everyone! The whole world!

Today we can stand once again before this sacrifice. We marvel at it and move towards Jesus, feeling our way along. We can only understand in fragments the miracle that took place there on the cross. Even if our sense of this miracle is very faint, at least the sense is there. We can tell that this cross doesn’t simply have to do with “all people,” but that I too am personally involved with this. Here, I am personally confronted with my own sin and personally invited to be part of the crucifixion. The cross of Jesus on Mount Golgotha in Jerusalem. For me! How can I even imagine that?

One who experienced this personally is Barabbas, the man who stands as a symbol for all of us. Barabbas and his comrades were terrorists. They were responsible for attacks on the Roman occupation and had people’s blood on their hands. During one of their attacks, they were ambushed, arrested, and sentenced to death. Barabbas sits in his cell, chained. Minutes turn into hours, his thoughts go round and round. Behind him lies a wasted life, and ahead of him, death. Getting out of there, starting over, freedom, a new life? Those are completely out of the question. In a few hours, he must take his final walk. Suddenly, footsteps can be heard. Marching in step, the guard unit draws ever closer. Then the command rings out, “Unit, halt!” Barabbas knows. The time has come. This is the end for me. It’s over. But before that happens, the door to the neighboring cell is flung open. The names of his two comrades can be clearly heard. Chains clank, doors slam, and then they are led away. The unit marches off.

Then a guard opens Barabbas’s cell door. The warden steps into the cell and says, “Barabbas, you’re so lucky. How did you pull that off? Who spoke on your behalf? You’re free! You can go.” Barabbas doesn’t understand a word. He looks at the guard in disbelief. “Are you kidding?” The warden explains to him, “Pilate wanted to release a prisoner to celebrate the Passover. He let the

people choose: a certain Jesus of Nazareth who arrived in Jerusalem a few days ago to great jubilation, or you. The people called out for you: 'Release Barabbas!' Here's your release form." Now Barabbas *really* doesn't understand. He only knows that he can go. He is free. His life has been spared and will go on. He won't stay in that hole a second longer. He hurries through the streets of Jerusalem, then through the city gate, just to get away and leave everything behind.

A large crowd has gathered on the hill outside the city. It is the Place of the Skull, the place of execution, Golgotha. As Barabbas approaches, he sees three crosses with men hanging from them. He knows the men on the left and right crosses well. They are his comrades, terrorists like him, guilty like him. But the one in the middle? He pushes his way forward to the barrier. Now he can make out the sign attached to the middle cross. He reads: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." At that moment, he begins to understand: That is Jesus. I owe my freedom to him. If he weren't hanging there, I would be. Above me, a sign would hang with *my* name and *my* crime. "Barabbas, rebel, terrorist, murderer." But there it says, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." He hangs where I should be hanging. Him instead of me. So that I may be free and keep my life. So that I may live.

Dear congregation, according to common interpretation, "Barabbas" means "Son of the father." In Barabbas, we can recognize ourselves, even if we are not terrorists and try to live our lives in a good and decent manner. It is nevertheless our situations, yours and mine, before God. "Son of the father." We are all children of the one Father. We are descendants of Adam and therefore belong to the race of sinners and rebels against God. We have forfeited paradise. Yet today we learn that another, Jesus, has taken our place. The Innocent One stands in for me and bears God's judgement. The crucifix—the cross with Jesus in our churches—is a terrible symbol of execution. It tells you and me, "That is where you belong" but through Christ, you are free. He hangs in your place. He gives you life. You can go forth into life.

Whether Barabbas merely looked at Jesus on the cross in disbelief or stood before him full of gratitude, we do not know. But the Bible tells us that whoever believes in Jesus Christ is free from sin. Whoever trusts in Jesus Christ has eternal life. One of the two men executed with Jesus also experienced that when Jesus spoke to him: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Dear congregation, the lengths people will go to in order to attain freedom are truly remarkable. Especially in recent days, the call for freedom has grown very loud. The people of Iran are crying out and longing to finally be free. So are the people of Ukraine. In a way that is hard to fathom, even those who live in a democracy and enjoy every freedom are also crying out ever louder for freedom. What is this freedom, really? It is about finally living in peace, without fear, and under humane conditions. That is a legitimate desire, and I have a great respect for all people who fight for this fundamental freedom both for themselves and for others. We should help them so that they can live in freedom. Yet what if the freedom to which so much hope is tied slips through our fingers like sand? What if families are torn apart and despite all material aid the heart remains empty? Then it becomes clear. There is a deeper freedom that no state can grant and no revolution can win.

Jesus walked the path to the cross to win for us life, freedom, and peace. Barabbas was likely the first to experience this life, freedom, and peace of Christ. So was the man on the cross beside Him. He cried out, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom," and his plea was heard by Jesus Christ. The way of the cross is a drastic path. The cross starkly reveals to us what lies ahead. Christ took upon Himself all this guilt, not merely in appearance but in reality. This means I cannot merely look at the cross from outside and draw hope or comfort from it. No, I am transferred, body and soul, from the realm of the condemned to the realm of the free. Not as a spectator, but as one who is set free. One for all: that is Good Friday. Amen.