

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *The Trial of Jesus*

**SERIES:** *Resurrection*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Matthew 27*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

**DATE:** *2024 - 3 - 24*

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*\*Credit to Tim Mackie (Bible Project)*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church. It is so good to worship with you today, everybody here in the room and also to those of you tuning into the livestream.

Next Sunday, is Easter Sunday. We are now just one week away from the central event of our faith...**Resurrection (Graphic)**

And for the past several weeks we've been tagging along with Jesus on his final week before the crucifixion. Following this story through Matthew's writing. So if you have your Bible we are heading to Matthew 27 today. I also want to encourage you again, if you are interested in more on this, to check out Tim Mackie's podcast on the book of Matthew. Just really, really helpful and informative for me in making sense of some of these familiar events in the Easter story.

Today we want to take a look at

## **I. The Trial of Jesus**

And it's interesting because one of the questions many of us have is, how did Jesus, **the innocent man**, end up **a criminal** on a cross? What happened, who was at fault? And there are all of these different characters involved. Pilate. The Chief priests. Barabbas. The crowds. They all play a part and, as we'll see today, we also

play a part. It turns out this is not just an ancient story about something that happened a long time ago...it really is a story about the human condition. We are all meant to find ourselves in this story, and how we participate in the death of the innocent. And hopefully that will become clear as we make our way through the message.

In fact, Tim Mackie talks about this, that one of the greatest story tellers of all time, was so intrigued by the story of the trial of Jesus that he wrote about it in one of his great plays. William Shakespear in his well-known play **Macbeth**. It's a story about people shedding the blood of an innocent man and **what happens to people when they give in to the impulse to get rid of people they don't like, even innocent people?**

If you're not familiar with this tragedy it's the story of a Scottish General, **Macbeth** and his wife, **Lady Macbeth**, who conspire to kill, assassinate the **King**, King Duncan and therefore take his throne.

And there's this one scene, near the end of the play where Lady Macbeth is overcome with remorse about what they've done, murdering Duncan...shedding innocent blood.

She is overwhelmed by guilt, it becomes so great, that she can't sleep any more. She's going crazy. She get's a doctor to observe her at night. And she has these nightmares where her hands are covered in blood. And she washes and scrubs her hands but they won't come clean. They are stained with innocent blood and she knows it and she is guilty for taking the life of another human. And she becomes trapped by guilt and despair and hopelessness.

And so Shakespear in this story, is exploring is the heart behind the trial of Jesus where groups of people conspire to kill the innocent Messiah...his blood is on their hands.

And so what I'd like to do today is walk through the story of the Trial of Jesus by looking at the various characters that played a role and I want to invite you to find yourself in this story. Where do you see yourself in the characters that we meet today?

So first let's start with Judas. And, yes Judas is actually a pre-trial character...we might say, he is the one most directly responsible for bringing Jesus to trial in the first place.

### **A. Judas**

**Matthew 27 - <sup>3</sup> When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. <sup>4</sup> "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."**

**"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."**

**<sup>5</sup> So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.**

Kind of a disturbing story. Now, we don't know exactly what caused Judas to change his mind about Jesus and to become seized with remorse.

But I wonder, if perhaps, it was the integrity of Jesus. The utterly sincere and authentic behavior of Jesus in the most dire of circumstances.

Think about it, for two years Judas had heard Jesus teach...things like, *"If someone slaps you on the right cheek turn to them the other, if a Roman soldier forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two. Love your enemies and do good those who persecute you. For this is the way of the Kingdom of Heaven."* And perhaps Judas had begun to think, as some of us think, that's a nice thing to say Jesus, but that

way of living will never work in the real world. And so after two years, he was ready to give up on Jesus. Hand him over to be eliminated. Which he had done.

But, now, in this moment, he watches as Jesus begins to live out the very life he been teaching about. Jesus was acting out the person he taught his disciples to be. He is turning the other cheek and loving his enemies.

And so I wonder if it was the authentic behavior of Jesus that caused Judas to realize, Jesus is who he said he was. And that perhaps, as followers of Jesus today, the best way to communicate the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, is not by shouting louder, clever arguments, controlling others, gaining more power but rather will be in sincere, quiet, authentic living like Jesus.

So, Judas, has come to realize that he has betrayed the innocent and turned him over to his death. And just like Lady Macbeth he is overwhelmed with a sense of guilt for what he has done. And he can't wash the stain off of his own hands. He has come face to face with his own sin and brokenness and he doesn't know what to do. He even tries to give back the money. Maybe he can clear his conscience by returning the profits. But he is overwhelmed with remorse and it destroys him.

***Judas, can't imagine a world where there would be enough forgiveness and grace to cover what he has done and so he takes his own life in total despair.***

*(Mackie)*

Did you know there are some in our world, maybe some in this room or watching on-line, who have felt this before? You think back over your life and certain decisions you made, ways you behaved, circumstances that happened and you are overwhelmed by your own guilt and shame, and you can't remove the stain, and have thought, surely there cannot be enough forgiveness and grace to cover the wrong you have committed. And you find yourself in despair just like Judas. If that's you, stick with me to the end of this message.

Second, the...

### **B. Chief Priests**

**<sup>6</sup> The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.”**

**<sup>7</sup> So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. <sup>8</sup> That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day.**

This is very fascinating how they deal with their own wrong, their own injustice, their own evil if you will and shows us just how complicated the systems of human evil and injustice can be.

Are **the chief priests** aware that what they are doing is wrong? Conspiring against Jesus and taking him before Pilate? Do they know they will be responsible for the death of an innocent man? Yeah, they do don’t they. They seem to know that what they are doing is wrong.

They even call this money that Judas returns...**blood money**. What is blood money? It’s dirty money. It’s money paid, in order to have an innocent man, that they simply don’t like and who is a threat to them, killed. They say, “We can’t dedicate this kind of dirty money to a Holy God.” So, let’s go buy a field instead.

What is the field for? A burial plot for foreigners. So think about this, people who are “out of towners” come to the holy city of Jerusalem. This is the central city of Judaism. Visitors all year long, maybe coming to see family or to visit the Temple or during special occasions like Passover. And just by the course of human events, some “out-of-towners” die while visiting the Holy City. Well it’s not like in our day where you can just fly the body home, for a funeral service. Some of these people have come from miles away, traveling multiple days. And cities needed proper burial sites for foreigners and out of towners.

**The chief priests decide to use the money for the public good.** We might even call this a noble act they are doing with the blood money. And so do you notice what the chief priests are doing? They are going to justify their immoral behavior, the shedding of innocent blood, essentially by saying “we are doing this evil thing for a good cause.” The means are justified by the end result.

How often as individuals or even as a society have we justified our actions or behavior because “at least we got the results we wanted.” We’ll accept, even justify the blood stains on our hands because it was for a good cause.

But there’s more as well. Notice how their unjust behavior spreads, infects and involves others who don’t even know they are participating in the shedding of innocent blood. Think about it, all of **those** families, **who** in future will **buy burial plots** from this field will benefit from the shedding of Jesus blood, without even knowing it.

Mackie suggests, this is intended to be a complex picture of how, we humans participate in systems of corruption and exploitation in our world without even knowing it.

For example...you go and buy your favorite chocolate at the grocery store and you don’t think much about it. And then you hear a story on the news about where some of the cocoa beans are harvested that are being used to make your favorite chocolate and the possible exploitation of workers, even child labor. It’s a system of innocent people being exploited for your benefit and all you did was buy your favorite chocolate.

Or maybe you don’t like chocolate, if there is such a person. After we talked about this in our Sermon meeting, Pastor Bill said he started to think about the piece of land where their home sits. He said I couldn’t help but wonder that 300 or 400 years

ago, it's likely the land he lives on today, and this might be true of many of us belonged to Native Americans, who land was taken through corrupt dealings. And in a sense we didn't have anything to do with that...but we benefit today from the exploitation of the innocent.

Entire systems in our world where we benefit from the shedding of innocent blood and don't even know it or we do and don't' really know what to do about it. We're caught up in the complex systems and we have blood on our hands too!

Third,

### **C. Pilate**

**<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"**

**"You have said so," Jesus replied.**

**<sup>12</sup> When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.**

**<sup>13</sup> Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" <sup>14</sup> But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.**

So, Pilate is the Roman authority over the city of Jerusalem and he is conflicted. He has come to believe that Jesus is innocent. But he doesn't want to have to deal with riots and insurrections. And so he makes an attempt to solve both issues at once.

**<sup>15</sup> Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. <sup>16</sup> At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"**

**<sup>18</sup> For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.**

It's important that you don't miss the significance of what is going on here. What is the criminal's name? Barabbas, right. But have you paid attention before, he actually has two names. It's **Jesus-Barabbas**. Matthew is deliberately making a comparative connection between two Jesus's in this story. Jesus-Barabbas and **Jesus the Messiah**.

Now we know from Mark's Gospel, that Barabbas is in prison because he is an insurrectionist and murderer. In other words, he was a part of a group of violent rebel Jews who rebelled against the Romans. He killed Romans, in order to fight for the freedom of the Jews and was imprisoned for it.

Jesus Barabbas could not be more opposite than Jesus the Messiah. He likely thought Jesus was a crazy for suggesting things like turning cheeks and loving enemies.

And so, in the story, Matthew is showing the choice that the crowds are faced with. Will they choose the way of Jesus Barabbas or Jesus the Messiah? And in many ways, we find ourselves facing that exact same choice every day of our lives. Will we choose the way of the world, the methods of the world in order to get our way and accomplish our goals or will we choose the way of Jesus the Messiah?

**<sup>20</sup> But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.**

**<sup>21</sup> "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered.**

Unfortunately for Pilate, the crowds choose Jesus Barabbas. Pilate's attempt to free the innocent man did not work.

**<sup>22</sup> "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked.**



**They all answered, “Crucify him!”**

**<sup>23</sup> “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.**

**But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”**

I told you he is a conflicted man. He knows Jesus is innocent, but he doesn't want to deal with the crowds. What can he do?

**<sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”**

**<sup>25</sup> All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”**

**<sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.**

Ultimately for **Pilate**, he makes his decision based on **personal self-interest**. Jesus innocence, isn't worth the trouble. He's got plans to watch NCAA basketball games and maybe go golfing today. He's done dealing with this.

And he makes this almost comedic declaration. It's so incredibly ironic. Because who is the only innocent person at the trial? Jesus. Right? And Pilate has the nerve to, wash the blood of the innocent man from his hands, and to simply declare himself as the innocent one!

**He declares himself innocent, in the very act of showing that he too is guilty of innocent blood. (Mackie)**

**How does personal self-interest carry the day, in the decisions we make in our own lives?**

And then finally there are the crowds at the trial.

#### **D. The Crowds**

Now, just to clarify a bit regarding the crowds. Many people tend to think that this is the same crowd that was hailing Jesus as Messiah on Palm Sunday. And perhaps you have heard or wondered yourself, “how could the crowds have turned on Jesus so quickly?” Praising him one day and then a few days later ready to crucify him? Doesn’t make sense.

It’s more likely that there are two separate crowds. **The crowd hailing him as King** on Palm Sunday, was more likely **Galilean pilgrims**, who had heard Jesus teachings and miracles before coming to Jerusalem for the Passover.

But **the Friday crowd** shouting that Jesus be crucified on this day is more likely **city folk from Jerusalem**. Much more heavily influenced by the temple leaders and a desire to maintain the Jerusalem religious order.

And so for this crowd, their primary motivation regarding Jesus, is one of **national security and stability**. They believe Jesus is a threat to the power of the Jerusalem system, a system they benefit from. And so they think it is totally legitimate to shed innocent blood for their own safety and security. They will accept the blood guilt on their hands. *(His blood be on us and our children.)*

This crowd represents those who have rejected the way of Jesus the Messiah and his kingdom of peace. And they are choosing, instead, very clearly to follow the way of Jesus Barabbas and the freedom fighter movement and their rebellion against Rome.

Fascinating story, the trial of Jesus and all of these characters, the shedding of innocent blood, Jesus life hanging in the balance. So, let’s go back to the question we started with earlier...

## II. Where do you find yourself in the story?

Different people respond to and are guilty of the blood of the innocent.

Some identify with **Judas**. As we look back on our lives and become aware of our sin and brokenness, we know we are guilty and we are **overwhelmed with remorse** and we wonder if there is enough grace and forgiveness to cover our guilt.

Some of us, find ourselves in **the chief priests**. We have an awareness of our participation in the injustice of the world, but **we justify it in the name of “a greater good.”** The benefits we receive outweigh our concern for the innocent.

Some of us find ourselves in the shoes of **those purchasing the burial plots**. We have come to realize that we are caught up in the worlds system of injustices, and **we are confused** and we don't know what to do about it. We can't just stop living in the world and never buy anything ever again.

Some of us are like **Pilate**. Completely aware of the way we participate in the “shedding of innocent blood” but ultimately because of **a greater concern for our own self-interests**, we say “well there's nothing I can really do about it.” And so we just declare ourselves to be innocent and just get on with our lives.

And some of us are like **the Friday crowds**. Our greatest concern is for **our own** sense of **security** and safety and a desire to maintain the status quo, the system of power that we benefit from, even if it means innocent people suffer.

Wherever you find yourself in this story, this is a picture of our world. Is it not? A world that is lost, broken and confused and corrupt and exploitative. And every single one of us caught up in it. What do we do? What is the answer?

Well Matthew tells us that there is one other character in the story...in this trial that is taking place there is one innocent person. **Jesus the Messiah.**

And he doesn't stand up for himself and he doesn't try to justify himself and he doesn't even declare himself to be innocent. Instead what does Jesus think he is doing? How does Jesus think about all of these characters who clamoring to figure out how they might use the shedding of his blood for their benefit? What does Jesus think about all of the confused, corrupt, pathetic, uninformed, broken, despairing people in this world.

Well, he absolutely loves every single one of them. He loves Judas. And he loves the chief priests. He loves Pilate and he loves Barabbas and the Friday crowds. And his love is so great, that he is bound and determined on this day, to give his life for theirs.

The Apostle Paul, trying to explain this says...**[Romans 5 – 6](#) You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless (helpless), Christ died for the ungodly (rebels). 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous (innocent) person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Folks this is the story of humanity and the central story of our faith. We, every single one of us, are part of a helpless humanity, lost humanity, confused humanity. Selfish, power-mongering, justifying, excusing, lost. And at the very center of this story is Jesus the Messiah. The only innocent one. Quietly, living out God's sacrificial love for one's enemies. While we are stuck in the muck and the mire of the human condition, God's love in human form, dies for us.

And so wherever you find yourself in the story, if you get nothing from this message or our entire series, Matthew was trying to let us know that Jesus of Nazareth, absolutely loves you. Despite our apathy and our ignorant participation in shedding

the blood of the innocent...he loves us. And he gave his life for us. That's what we are hanging out hats on at Easter.

So as we close our service today we want to remember this greatest expression of God's love for us. Through communion we are reminded of our brokenness and guilt but also of the body and blood of Jesus graciously and lovingly given on our behalf.

**Communion 8am service (Old Ritual):**

And so, if you would please stand and servers if you would please come and take your places down front. Just a word of instruction as move into our time of communion.

When you receive the bread, you may hold it and when everyone has been served will sit and all eat the bread together. When you receive the cup. You may drink it, place the empty container back in the tray and then serve the person next to you. If you prefer gluten free bread, please raise your hand and Dad or Bill will bring it to you.

We do this, because on the night that Jesus was betrayed he took bread broke it, he also took a cup and blessed it and gave it to his disciples and we will do the same. So we you join me as we pray over the elements.

**Friends this bread which we break...(SERVE)**

If you would stand and join me again and servers if you would come forward.

**Friends this cup which we bless, is it not...(SERVE)**

**9:45am Service:**

So at this time I'm going to invite the worship team to come forward and servers you can come and take your places down front as well. In just a moment we're going to read our corporate prayer together. When we are done reading, you can begin

entering the two side center aisle's, walk down front...take bread and eat, juice and drink. And then slightly differently this morning, we have little bins for you to drop your empty cup into, rather than trying to place it back in the tray. Just drop it in the bin and then make your way back to your seat.

If you prefer gluten free bread, just ask when you get down front.

Let's read this prayer together...

***"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen"***