

**April 5, 2020 – The Cleansing Power of Love**

**Given by Rev. Mattei**

Matthew 27: 11-54

Not everybody has the same appreciation for the legal system. Follow any trial in any country with an authoritarian regime and you will soon realize that what is going on with much theatrics is either exoneration of the guilty or blatant disregard of the truth for the condemnation of the innocent. In North America, most white people seem confident in our legal system, convinced that good generally overcomes evil. Such widely spread confidence is not totally shared by people of other ethnic groups[[1]](#footnote-1).

No matter your ethnic background and social status, the trial of the innocent Jesus is evidence of cruel injustice. Matthew’s second trial of Jesus evolves in and around Pilate’s headquarters. The first trial takes place before the Sanhedrin, presided over by the high priest (Mt 26:57-68). That first trial included false witnesses, contempt, and torture. There, the sought-after outcome is a death sentence, but this is a verdict a Jewish court cannot deliver. Hence, they turn to the Roman occupier. Those of us observing the trial know what should happen: Jesus should be exonerated, and all should be well. But this will never happen where there is bias, hatred, deceit, and jealousy. Those exposed by the Truth will all too easily resort to lies and trumped-up charges (Psalm 64:1-6). This Truth does not escape Pilate, the Roman governor, nor his wife (vv. 17-19). He is quick to wash his hands of Jesus’ blood while the crowd claims it for themselves.

Jesus is flogged, mocked, and led away to be crucified. Through the streets of Jerusalem, however, not all the bystanders seem to enjoy their entertainment. Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus’ cross all the way to Golgotha. There, soldiers gamble over Jesus’ clothing; the chief priests, scribes, and elders mock his predicament. Even those crucified by Jesus’ side join in the taunting. Throughout this time, even his disciples are nowhere to be found and God seems utterly absent. Jesus is totally forsaken. In the face of such crass injustice, are the disciples muted and afraid, hiding in the crowd? Are they waiting for a miracle to happen? For the power to be to show restraint and to intervene? For the crowd to renounce its mob fever? Where are they, the disciples, those who had seen him give sight to the blind and freedom to the captives? Where are we when the innocent is cruelly violated? When bigotry becomes the new normal? When scapegoating searches for a target to redirect people’s fears, anger, and insecurity? When justice is misrepresented? When power is abused? When our humanity and decency escape us?

The story of Jesus’ unjust trial and wrongful conviction must not be spiritualized. It’s not enough to say that he died for our sins and to beat our breast. In Matthew’s account, we see not an anomaly of the legal system, but a dreadful reminder of the way it often operates: the most powerful, the ones in charge, when corrupt and seeking to please the crowds, dictate the outcome. Often, our lack of attention, our indifference, or even worse our avoidance of public exposure prevents us from speaking up. Our silence perpetuates injustice. We are the guilty ones in this real-life courtroom drama. But the blood spilled, Jesus’ blood as well as the blood of the millions who suffer unjustly, through the grace and power of God, will become the means to our salvation. We can dare to trust that God’s justice is greater than our own. In fact, God’s justice is meant not to condemn but to redeem, reconcile and restore us to life. God knows we are in need of God’s mercy and on our own we would be lost. We are not punished for our sins, we are punished by our sins (such as blindness, egocentricity, stubbornness, or pride). God’s justice sets us on the journey of transformation: we have a chance of enjoying wholeness and savor our full humanity. When we take responsibility for the problem and understand that we have contributed in sending Jesus to Golgotha then our repentance is trustworthy, our desire to make amends is sincere, and our salvation is closer: we can trust God’s mercy.

May Christ’s association with the suffering of those who are scapegoated, abused and cruelly dehumanized open our mind and our heart to the suffering of others. May God have mercy on us and allow us to see our resistance to unity with God and one another. May we be filled with grace and rejoice in the cleansing power of God’s forgiveness. Amen.

1. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/US.html#disparities>; <https://www.vsb.org/docs/valawyermagazine/dec00dunnaville.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)