

**The Green Hill Presbyterian Church**  
**Good Friday, April 3, 2026 – Table Copy**

**SILENT PREPARATION:**

According to all four canonical gospels, there was a prevailing Passover custom in Jerusalem that allowed Pontius Pilate, the *praefectus* – or governor of Judea – to commute one prisoner's death sentence by popular acclaim. In one such instance, the "crowd" (ὄχλος: óchlos), "the Jews" and "the multitude" in some sources, are offered the choice to have either Barabbas or Jesus released from Roman custody. According to the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the account in John, the crowd chooses Barabbas to be released and Jesus of Nazareth to be crucified.

**SCRIPTURE READING**

, Mark 15:6-15

*As we come to our reading from Mark's Gospel, the chief priests, the scribes, and the council have brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, for judgment....*

Now at the festival he [Pilate] used to release a prisoner for them,  
anyone for whom they asked.

Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists –  
who had committed murder during the insurrection.

So the crowd came,  
and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom.

Then he answered them,  
“Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”  
For he realized that it was out of jealousy  
that the chief priests had handed him over.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd –  
to have him release Barabbas for them, instead.

Pilate spoke to them again,  
“Then what do you wish me to do with the man  
you call the King of the Jews?”

They shouted back, “Crucify him!”  
Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?”

But they shouted – all the more, “Crucify him!”

So Pilate – wishing to satisfy the crowd – released Barabbas for them,  
and – after flogging Jesus – he handed him over to be crucified.

**MEDITATION:**

“The News from Jerusalem”

Good Evening!

I am a reporter for **The Jerusalem Journal**,  
and – when my editor sent me out on the streets –  
I just happened to encounter **Barabbas** –  
just a few days after Jesus had been crucified.

This is what he told me:

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I didn't sleep that night. Not really.

You don't just go – from a **Roman** death sentence,  
to walking out into the sunlight like nothing happened –  
and then drift off – like it was a normal day.

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Every time I close my eyes I hear it again:  
My name. **“Barabbas.”** Shouted. Chosen.

Not because I was innocent,  
not because I deserved anything,  
just...chosen...anyway....

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I know what I was supposed to do that day.

I've seen enough crucifixions to understand how the story ends.

You just don't walk away from that hill –  
**Rome** doesn't change its mind halfway through.

And – yet – here I am –  
breathing air that should have run out yesterday...  
with hands that should have been nailed to wood...  
instead of hanging here –  
like I don't quite know what to do with them.

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And I can't get Him out of my head.

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I didn't know Him.

I knew of Him – like everyone else did.

The teacher.

The one people argued about.

The one who – apparently –

made the religious leaders nervous enough to want Him gone.

But I did not expect Him to look like that.

Not angry.

Not scrambling to save Himself.

Not even trying to argue His way out of it.

Just...steady...

Like He knew exactly what was happening –  
and wasn't surprised by any of it.

Which is deeply unsettling –

when you are watching a man walk straight into your death...  
like it belongs to Him.

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At this point, Barabbas paused – as if to compose himself...

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I keep telling myself that it was just the crowd.

People get loud,

they get emotional,

they make terrible decisions.

That is all this was. Noise. Chaos. Bad timing.

Right name shouted at the right moment.

That is how I got out.

That is how He didn't.

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Except that explanation doesn't hold up very well – once things get quiet.

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Because I have spent my entire life around men who fight to stay alive.  
Men who claw, and curse, and bargain – for just one more breath.

I have been one of them.

You do not just accept a cross.

You do not just stand there while people decide your fate –  
like you are already beyond it.

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Unless you believe something I clearly do not understand.  
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Again, Barabbas paused....he seemed to be searching for words.  
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And then the rumors start.  
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At first, it is just whispers – moving through the streets.

Women saying the tomb is empty.

Disciples acting like something impossible just happened.

Guards suddenly not wanting to talk about their night shift.

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And I know what dead looks like.

I know Rome does not mess that part up.

Dead is final.

Dead is the end.

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Except – apparently – it wasn't.  
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And – now – I have a problem I did not have yesterday.

Yesterday. I just had to live with the fact that another man died in my place.  
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That is heavy, to be sure, but at least it makes sense.

People die.

Sometimes you get spared.

End of story.  
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Barabbas now seemed be bordering on disbelief, or – perhaps – amazement.

But, he continued to speak....

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But if He did not stay dead...

Then this was not just a trade.

This was not just a crowd making a bad call between two men.

This means that He went there knowing exactly what He was doing.

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This means I was not an accident.

I was not a lucky break.

I was part of it.

And I do not know what to do with that.

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Because I was ready to die.

That story fit me.

I understood it.

It matched everything I had done –  
and everything I thought I deserved.

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But this story does not fit..

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This one says I am walking around with a life...

a life that was handed back to me...

by a man who chose to take my place...

and – then – walked out of His own grave...

like death did not get the final say.

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And that means my freedom is not random.

It has a name attached to it.

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And – if I am honest –

that might be the part people miss when they tell my story.

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Because it is easy to shake your head at the crowd –  
and to think that you would have chosen differently.

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It is easy to look at me – and think I was the exception,  
the worst one,  
the obvious wrong choice.

But the truth is...I am not the exception.

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Rather, I am the example.

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Here, Barabbas just slowly walked away.....just shaking his head.....

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After I returned to my office,  
I tried to get my own head around what Barabbas had told me.  
And, these words came to mind:

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We are all – in one way or another –  
guilty in ways we would rather not list out loud...  
hoping that – somehow –  
we are not the ones who have to pay for it.

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And the uncomfortable, beautiful, completely undeserved, truth,  
is that the story does not end with us getting what we deserve.

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It ends with Someone else stepping forward – and taking, it instead.

We might like to think that we would have chosen Jesus.

But the reality is...we – also are – Barabbas.

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We – also – are the ones who walked free.

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And that is The News from Jerusalem.

Thanks be to God! Amen.