

He Did Receive Him Back

14 March • Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Hebrews 11:13-26

¹³These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

¹⁷By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ¹⁹He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ²⁰By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. ²¹By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. ²²By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

²³By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. ²⁴By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, ²⁵choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Meditation

The epistle of Hebrews is well-known for its splendour of its language and the grandeur expositions. Hebrews chapter 11 is an all-time favourite of all those who want to articulate faith and deals at length with the doctrine of faith. The very first verse defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” and rest of the chapter directs us to the whole history of Israel and the faith illumined people of the past. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob all died in faith without having received the promises but they all saw the ‘promise’ with their faith. This depicts their magnitude of faithfulness and because of it God cherishes to be called as their God. It is written that even though they were not able to see the ‘promises’, God has prepared a city for them. It is all because of their faith and only through faith that we can please God. Will our God be pleased or ashamed to be addressed as our God?

From today’s text we can articulate faith as a leap into darkness which means moving forward without knowing where He is leading. Abraham was asked to leave his country, his kindred and his father’s house and also asked to offer Isaac. Thus for Abraham, faith became renouncing the beloved and embracing God’s long road. In Moses’ life, he relinquished the privilege of being the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and welcomed sufferings with the people of God. For Moses, faith is the readiness to give up securities of life. These adventures in faith moulded history and left an immortal impression on the minds of every generation.

We need to remember that throughout history, God used many ordinary people for His redemptive purposes. He calls an individual, sanctifies and commissions him/her for a divine mission. This is what is narrated in today’s passage and in continuation, it emphatically reiterates

the spiritual axiom i.e., faith produces hope, hope produces perseverance and perseverance produces God's intervention in history with unceasing love and deliverance of His people. God is calling each one of us for His mission. Are we ready to take up His commission to translate His love and will in our mundane realm? May God bless us all. Amen.

Prayer

Father God; grant us grace to draw closer to Your presence, adorned with our righteous deeds and blameless living. All through our lives, along with Your chosen people, make us worthy to proclaim our faith in You and Your steadfast love towards the whole created order. May Jesus Christ strengthen us to offer praise and thanks to our Saviour Jesus Christ, our Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Action

Re-examine and re-dedicate our faith journey to the mighty hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. Life as God's people is not a smooth road, but a long road of trials and testing. Discern the signs of times and witness the Christian faith in our public space.

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Vicar*

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Made Alive Together with Him

15 March • Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Colossians 2:6-15

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Meditation

This passage is challenging. The author is writing to warn his audience about some false teachings. Here the author exhorted you to walk your talk. Your conduct must be reflective of your profession by continuing to be rooted and built up in Christ. Paul says in Colossians 2:8, “Don’t let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ.”

C.S. Lewis said this: *“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*

Don't mix and match from different spiritual options out there. Chances are that you weren't even aware you were doing this. It's usually subtle. The real threat comes in small incremental steps that lure God's people away from trusting Him. According to the author, our baptism points us to Christ through God's faithfulness when He raised Jesus from the dead.

Our “sin problem” was cancelled at the cross where God disarmed human and cosmic rulers and powers (cf 2:10). You are made alive by nailing it to Christ's cross. He cancelled the record that contained the charges against us.

The author reminded us that Jesus is all we need. Today, when people look at you and I, do they see any difference? You and I must be different because we believe in Jesus. That's how we look at everything in the world—through the lens of Christ. We are complete in Christ.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I reckon that You are all sufficient. Trouble will come my way. The enemy is like a prowling lion seeking to destroy me. Help me to keep my focus in following Jesus. Keep me alive in Christ, labouring for the gospel until He calls me home. Amen.

Action

Make time each day to read the Word. Remember that in baptism, we are alive in Christ. May we look at everything in the world through the lens of Christ.

*Rev Tan Cheng Huat
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Our God Whom We Serve Is Able to Deliver Us

16 March • Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Daniel 3:13-29

¹³Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ²²Because the king’s order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning

fiery furnace.

²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counsellors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” ²⁵He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

²⁶Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king’s counsellors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. ²⁸Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.”

Meditation

Christians here, unlike many believers elsewhere, may not easily experience, or even envisage faith-confronting darkness. Daniel and his three friends were in such a situation. Nebuchadnezzar had ordered all to worship him. While loyal in Nebuchadnezzar’s service, they had a higher loyalty to their one, true God. For likely

reasons of envy and jealousy, their non-compliance reached Nebuchadnezzar, possibly misconstrued and exaggerated.

How would we feel and fare if so summoned? Initially, this seemed friendly due to their record, reputation, responsibility and reliability. Can we, be like these, where though our faith be disliked, people cannot fault us for our character and conduct, work and worth? Nebuchadnezzar initially offered an easy way out. This must have been very tempting then and even today, we, like them, could entertain very good, pragmatic and persuasive reasons to accommodate and agree. The evil one's subtlety and strategy make compromise, even denial, compelling. We may idealise it is easier to stand up for our faith when faced with such threats and taunts as the trio did. We may even envisage that our faith could escalate to meet such situations. We easily forget that that the slide down the slippery road to sin and satan is often subtle, incidental and innocuous.

We must pray and prepare through His Word that, like them, our faith can have such an assurance and affirmation of accepting God's sovereign will, be it deliverance or death. Our passage ends with not only the mighty miracle of the trio's deliverance from the fiery furnace, where His presence and protection had been so overwhelmingly evident; but also the magnificent miracle of Nebuchadnezzar's enlightenment.

May our faith see through the surrounding darkness to the glorious light of His deliverance and triumph.

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank and praise You, that through

whatever darkness and gloom, problems and even persecution, we can see our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, Sanctifier and Sustainer, Deliverer and Victor. We are overwhelmed that our Lord Himself had suffered temptation, trials and torture and even denial and death for our sake. We uphold our fellow Christians, especially those in difficult situations and serving You faithfully and fearlessly. We pray that we all, including those won over by such testimonies and witness may always embrace, experience and express the light, love and life made possible through our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name, amen.

Action

Though limited in time and space let our prayer and His Word help us reach out to a needy world with the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, our all sufficient Saviour in every situation.

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President, Fellowship of Evangelical Students (FES)*

Made Perfect Through Suffering

17 March • Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Hebrews 2:8b-18

⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹²saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

¹³And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God,

to make propitiation for the sins of the people.¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Meditation

Suffering? What a bad idea! Count me out!

But before we opt out of the suffering circuit too quickly, let's think again, with the Bible guiding our thinking process. The experience of suffering is common. Every religion and philosophy will try to make some sense of this phenomenon, usually by explaining it away, or providing people with the means of avoiding suffering. Some of us will remember the 'protect us from suffering' talismans that we possess before we came to faith in Christ!

In Holy Scripture, suffering is often seen in positive light. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake... when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad..." (Mt 5:10-12).

Hebrews 2:10 teaches that 'it was fitting that (God) should make the founder of their salvation (i.e. Jesus) perfect through suffering.' Jesus' suffering was God's idea! But why? The straightforward answer from the Bible is 'so that He is made perfect.'

The word 'perfect' in this text is translated from the Greek word *teleioō* which means completion, fullness, fully matured. Jesus' suffering for the sins of humanity completes His calling and mission as the Saviour of all

humanity. Thus we can firmly assert that 'there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' (Acts 4:12).

'Made perfect through suffering' is better understood as 'made complete through suffering.' Our decision to follow Jesus is the beginning of a process that is brought to fullness, completion, perfection when we also suffer for the sake of Him who died for us.

Suffering for Jesus - any takers?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that You chose the way of the cross, the path of suffering, for our sake. Indeed because You suffered and died for us, there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Please help me to follow You; being willing to suffer for the sake of others. Cause me to grow into spiritual maturity, fullness, perfection by walking the way of the cross of Christ. Amen.

Action

'Take up your cross' has a twin brother named 'deny yourself'. The willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ begins with the act of denying ourselves, i.e. the putting aside of self-interest in order to serve the will and purpose of God. As we seek to be made perfect through suffering, let us ask God to show us the areas in our lives which we need to deny ourselves, so that we are better attuned to suffer for His sake and glory.

*The Right Reverend Kuan Kim Seng
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He Was Crushed for Our Iniquities

18 March • Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Isaiah 53:1-7

- ¹Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
- ²For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
- ³He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
- ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
- ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
- ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.

Meditation

The fourth of the “servant songs” begins at Isaiah 52:13, continuing through 53:12 where it continues the

discussion of the suffering servant. There is no clear identification for the “servant” within this song, but if the reader pays close attention to the author’s word choice, one can deduce that the song could refer to either an individual or a group. Those that argue the “servant” to be an individual have proposed many candidates from Israel’s past. The song declares that the “servant” intercedes for others, bearing their punishments and afflictions. In the end, he/they are rewarded.

On the other hand, it is argued that the “servant” represents a group of people, more specifically the nation of Israel, and they feel that they have paid their dues and continue to suffer because of the sins of others (Is 53:7, 11-12). Also, through the author’s choice of words, we, our, and they, one could also argue that the “servant” was a group.

Early on the evaluation of the Servant by the “we” is negative: “we” esteemed him not, many were appalled by him, nothing in him was attractive to “us”. But at the Servant’s death, the attitude of the “we” changes after verse 4 where the servant suffers because of “our” iniquities, “our” sickness, but by the servant’s wounds “we” consequently are healed. Posthumously, then, the Servant is vindicated by God. Many Christians believe this song to be among the Messianic prophecies of Jesus (Is 52:13—53:12).

The main thrust of the passage is “We all, like sheep, have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way” (Is 53:6). Isaiah hits on the essence of sin here. The essence of sin is going one’s own way, rather than God’s way. Doesn’t this also describe you and me? Every time we sin, we are choosing our way rather than the way of the Lord.

Every time we make something more important than God, we are choosing our own way rather than God's way. Every time we make an idol of something, we choose our way rather than God's way. Every time we fail to live up to the name of Christian, we choose our way rather than God's way. Every time we easily miss worship, we choose our way rather than God's way. Every time we fail to submit to those in authority over us, we choose our way rather than God's way. Every time we belittle, insult, or hate our neighbour, we choose our way rather than God's way. Every time we cheat and swindle, fail to pay our bills, or take advantage of people, we choose our way rather than God's way. Every time we gossip, slander, lie, deceive, and tell half-truths, we choose our way rather than God's way. Every time we wrongly desire what belongs to another, we choose our way rather than God's way. We are the sheep that have turned to its own way. However, the writer stresses the importance of being in God's way and that is possible because of God's salvific activity.

Prayer

Creator God, we acknowledge that we have gone our own ways. We have failed to discern and discover Your ways for us. Forgive us O God and enable us to follow Your ways always in our lives. Amen.

Action

Think of the very many ways we have turned away from God and followed our own ways.

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The Bible Society of India*

He Was Put to Grief But Is Now Exalted

19 March • Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Isaiah 53:8-12

⁸By oppression and judgement he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?

⁹And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Meditation

The above passage is part of a larger literary unit (comprising Is 42:1-25; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13–53:12) known as the ‘Servant Songs’. There are four songs in all, and in them we are given a description of the

Servant of the Lord as well as the vital role that he is commissioned to fulfil. However, neither here nor in the other passages is the identity of the Servant disclosed. Most likely, the 'Servant' title applies to either the royal high priest or the king himself.

Since the start of His public ministry, Jesus saw Himself as the Servant, anointed by the Spirit and assigned 'to proclaim good news to the poor', 'to proclaim liberty to the captives,' and so forth (see Lk 4:17-21). Writing to the Philippians, the apostle Paul made an important disclosure: that Jesus had taken 'the form of a servant' and 'made Himself nothing' (2:7). Thus, for Christians the 'Servant' figure in the songs has become a direct reference to Jesus Christ; and today's verses a prophecy of the death and exaltation of Jesus.

Consider first the prophecy about Jesus' death. The Servant is assigned a grave—'with the wicked and with a rich man.' (v9). This anticipates Jesus' crucifixion with the two thieves at Calvary and His burial in the vault of the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. Lest His death be misconstrued as being caused by any wrong-doing on His part, the songs' composer insists upon His innocence—'He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth.' (v9). The composer adds a most significant note that in dying, 'His soul makes an offering for guilt' (v10).

Next, consider what follows afterwards. The Servant's death does not spell an end to His career. Instead, He lives on and is exalted. The text tells us that 'the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand' and that 'He shall see and be satisfied.' (vv10-11). In fact, so alive is the Servant that He now makes 'intercession for the transgressors!' (v12).

We rejoice that Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, has not only made atonement for our sin, but that He continues in intercession for us transgressors.

Prayer

Thank You Lord Jesus for being made an offering for my guilt. Intercede for me that I may be strong to live each day in righteousness, and in holy obedience to Your will. In Your name, I pray, amen.

Action

We have noted that though the passage does not specifically identify who the Servant is, the church has traditionally regarded the Servant as referring to Jesus. It is possible that the biblical writer wants to present a vision of what God can do with someone who is prepared to be His servant. So the text is like a job description to challenge us to live up to its specifications. Take a few moments to think of how you too can be such a servant.

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Who Crucified Jesus?

20 March • Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)

Matthew 27:1-54

¹When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. ²And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

³Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

¹⁵Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷So when they

had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. ¹⁹Besides, while he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." ²⁰Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²²Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

²⁴So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

³²As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.

³⁶Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴²"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Meditation

Some of today's anti-semitism stems from the belief that the Jews crucified Jesus. Yet a careful reading of today's passage from the whole of chapter 27 of Matthew reveals that the whole world crucified Jesus, from those who were closest to Jesus, to those furthest from Jesus.

A disciple crucified Jesus. It was Judas Iscariot, one of the 12 disciples who betrayed Jesus to the Roman soldiers looking for Him.

The ruling government crucified Jesus. Rome ruled Palestine and it was Pilate as the representative of the Roman emperor who said "crucify him".

It was for money that Jesus was crucified. We read in verse 3 that Judas had been given 30 pieces of silver by the chief priests and the elders.

The ruling priesthood crucified Jesus. We read in verse 1 that the chief priests and elders came to the decision to put Jesus to death.

The people as a crowd crucified Jesus. A crowd had gathered at the house of the Roman governor Pilate to ensure that Jesus was crucified rather than Barabbas.

The military crucified Jesus. Roman soldiers did their duty in killing Jesus. Without military might, there would not have been the execution.

Which category do you and I belong? Perhaps we pride ourselves as followers or even as disciples of Jesus. We are not above being like Judas.

Perhaps we pride ourselves on being in civil authority exercising governance above others. We are not above the Roman government of Palestine.

Perhaps we are in church leadership: we are not above

the ruling priesthood that chose to crucify Jesus, rather than see their spiritual rule undermined.

Perhaps we are just part of the crowd. We too can be driven by herd-instinct and follow those who shouted “crucify Jesus”. We cannot be identified in a crowd.

Perhaps we enjoy financial security in having money. We are not above accepting more (Judas was treasurer) in order to see our disappointment in God satisfied by crucifying Jesus.

Perhaps we enjoy military security in a country like Singapore. We are not above executing an unarmed Jesus, in order to enjoy the rewards of being strong.

It was the whole world and not just the Jews who crucified Jesus. You and I are in the world. As Christians, we are called to be not OF the world (Jn 15:19 *“As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen out of the world”*).

We are to be as aliens and strangers (1 Pet 2:11 *I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from evil desires, which war against your soul*) though in the world.

During this Lenten period, we are challenged to be in the world but not of it. We should not be afraid of suffering for as Peter wrote in his first epistle, *“he who has suffered in his body is done with sin”*. Jesus suffered in His body by being crucified by you and I, by those around Him and those far from Him, by the whole world gathered around the cross in Palestine. Jesus was put to death in the body, but is made alive in the Spirit.

We thank God that Jesus was accompanied by the same Spirit as He died on the cross for His last words were *“into your hands I commit my Spirit”* (Luk 23:46). We thank God that we have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Himself, accompanying us as we accompany Him this Lent in His journey to the cross where Jesus died, in order that you and I can be made alive in Christ.

Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus, bless us as we remember the passion and death of Your only Son, Jesus. Thank You that Jesus has given us His example to follow, and His presence today as the risen Jesus, to strengthen and comfort us as we live in the world, but not belonging to the world. Look upon us with pity and grant us Your mercy for falling short of who we ought to be. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Action

Think of how rejected Jesus was, from those close to Him and those far away, yet Jesus forgave them all by enduring to the very end the death He did not deserve. Forgive those who have rejected you, not through your own strength, but in the strength of that love which Jesus had, and still has for you, now seated on the right hand of God in risen glory.

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