

**We come to this day, Good Friday, and often talk about what Jesus on the cross did for us. We talk of his death as having accomplished something for us. But more and more, I struggle with the idea that the violence of crucifixion somehow brings peace and reconciliation to us. Maybe I am just worn out from seeing the pain of the world. Maybe it's grief. Maybe it is the war in Ukraine, the atrocities in the Holy Land – maybe it's the hardness with which we often speak to ourselves and others. Maybe it is one of a thousand other things that diminish our light and steal our life. I struggle with glorying in the cross of Jesus when everyday humanity, innocence, peace, and justice are being lifted high on the cross.**

**I have begun thinking less about what Jesus on the cross did for us and more about what Jesus on the cross asks of us. What if we were to hear the cross more as a question than a statement? What if we were to see the cross more as a revelation than an accomplishment? What if Good Friday holds before us a choice between Jesus and Barabbas?**

**“Pilate asks, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” They shouted in reply, “Not this man, but Barabbas.”**

**That is the Good Friday choice in all four gospels, and it is not just a choice made on Good Friday. It is a choice we make every day. It is a choice that shapes the world we live in. That choice determines how we see ourselves and one another, it guides how we live and treat each other. Let's use Jesus and Barabbas as windows through which we see our lives. They describe our ways of being toward others and ourselves. We live in the tension between Jesus and Barabbas.**

**Jesus is the one who came that we may “have life and have it abundantly.” He offers a peace the world does not know and cannot give. He is the one who said, “Put away your sword.” “Turn the other cheek.” “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “Love your enemies.” “Forgive seventy-seven times.” That is how he lived and how he died.**

**Barabbas, however, lives by the sword. He is an insurrectionist and a disturber of the peace. He turns things upside down. He commits murder and takes life.**

**Jesus lives for others, but Barabbas lives for himself. Jesus is a giver. Barabbas is a taker. Jesus stretches out his arms to embrace the world. Barabbas takes up arms to have his way in the world. Jesus has beliefs**

**and values for which he is willing to die. Barabbas has beliefs and values for which he is willing to kill.**

**I feel the tension of Jesus and Barabbas in my life. Some days I'm guided by Jesus and other days by Barabbas. I commit to peace and then pick up the sword. I want to forgive when I've been hurt or betrayed; but I also really just want to settle a score. I oppose violence and then justify and excuse it depending on the circumstances, who the other is, and what he or she has done.**

**When have you lived as Jesus and when have you lived as Barabbas? Where do you see them in your life? What would it take to choose Jesus? What is the Jesus choice for you today? In each of our lives there are Jesus choices to be made. In every conflict or disagreement there are Jesus choices to be made. In the issues that challenge and plague our families, our village and our country there are Jesus choices to be made.**

**The Good Friday cross does not once and for all make that choice for us. It continually holds that choice before us. Jesus' death on the cross did not extinguish the cruelty of the world. It continues to expose and condemn it. The cross is not a sign of God's conquering power but a sign that God stands with those conquered by power. The crucifixion did not change the ways of the world. It is calling us to change our ways in the world.**

**We have got to start choosing more Jesus than Barabbas because what we are doing now is not working.**

**Isn't it interesting that Jesus never asked us to glory in his cross, but he did ask us to take up our cross and follow him? What is the Jesus choice for you today?**