

The Burden of Proof 4-10-20

We all have good days and bad days. We have called this day, the day that falls into a 3-day period that changed the world Good Friday. Why is it so named? Catholic notes on the day correlate the word good to God, so God's Friday. The Germans referred to the day in English as actually sorrowful Friday. We also associate the word good with holy or holy Friday. No matter where we get the term, we realize it was that specific Friday that leads to the joyous resurrection Sunday we now call know as Easter.

Many events are noted in this long passage we read today or listened to on the audio clip. John 18 begins with a prayer in the garden Jesus had with his Father. The garden was a familiar place for all of them as Jesus took the disciples there often for teaching and times of prayer and contemplation. We see Judas coming with a detachment of soldiers to arrest Jesus, although the soldiers were really not needed as there would be no struggle. We all watch crime shows, and from my own background with the thousands of police reports I read in my previous career, know that usually when someone is caught, they try to flee. It was not so with Jesus. His disciples tried to stop the arrest. Peter became so enraged he cut off the ear of a soldier with his sword as for Peter this was a battle. Not so with Jesus, he knew the events that had to take place and he was going to go with the soldiers willingly. It was probably more upsetting that one of his own had to betray him to get the process in motion. Prisoners are usually handcuffed or for the more violent ones, even today, shackled. Jesus was bound, which could have been both hands and feet.

Our arrest process is similar today to the time of Jesus, although today we have paperwork. It was what kept me employed those many years for the Reading Police, but not done in the same way then. We don't have the name of the disciple who was known to the high priest, but it states he went with Jesus. We miss this part of the text often and more often than not the events are depicted as a bound Jesus being taken only

by the soldiers without any representation of the disciples. The text moves on quickly to Peter's denial of Jesus not once, but three times. The arrest of Jesus would be the same as our officers arresting a suspect and taking him first for an initial appearance in front of a district magistrate, a local court. A few questions are posed to Jesus about his actions similar more to a detective who first questions the subject before an arraignment and bail can be made. Annas, named as the father in law to the high priest, asked him about his teachings with his disciples. The answers Jesus gave were not liked by those present, and just like our TV and real-life scenes play out, some police brutality was used on the prisoner, Jesus, to get his attention. Jesus defends his words as truth, and he is taken next to that today version of the magistrate who was Caiaphas. the actual high priest's words are not recorded here in John, but we know he sent Jesus for what today would be an immediate trial.

Today our court system has slowed down considerably since the days of Jesus and his disciples. In those days, the Roman government ruled supreme and made quick and hasty judgements. If you look at the inserts, I have placed in the bulletin you see both a rule to show cause and a complaint. We use documents just like this today that our police officers and detectives complete to bring before the judge at arraignment and are later added to as the court cases continue. Today we have a court system that does not judge quickly but takes time in deliberations over each and every case. At this time, a witness list is also created which simply shows the arresting officer's name and any people who will testify one way or the other who actually saw the crime take place. Attorneys are hired or provided for each of the parties involved as listed here, Pontius Pilate and Jesus of Nazareth. Unlike our court system today, the plaintiff does not become the judge. We also have a jury of twelve who are chosen from many more than that number and interviewed by the attorneys. There was a jury in this case, if you can

count the crowd assembled. Each year a crowd made the decision of which criminal to free during the Passover celebration.

We can be glad today judges are available who are impartial, because Pontius Pilate was far more worried about his standing as governor of Rome than being impartial. He asks Jesus the questions as listed on the complaint. His cause was what he had heard was going in his land where his people were hearing this man named Jesus tell them all types of stories and teachings. Jesus was becoming very popular with the people, too popular. It's a good thing when everyone likes you. It makes us happy when we know who are true friends are, but what happens when even our friends turn on us? We still may call them Judas today due to the events that led up to this day in history. Pilate goes all through the motions he needed to in order to get to a point of sentencing. In our modern court systems even that part of the ordeal is left for weeks and even months until the judge decides a proper punishment for the crime.

No one pities Pilate for his decision, but it would be understood best by those who make similar decisions today. Pilate wanted to keep his position. He truly ably did not see any cause to arrest Jesus, but the others in the high courts did. The complaints of the Sadducees and Pharisees of Jesus' blatant disregard for all they felt were things that could never be changed or questioned. We question God and the authorities all the time. We don't defend our presidents as we once did when they hold that office for many reasons. We don't abide by what the judges decide and reopen cases and return to the court system hoping for a better outcome. Authority of all types today is taken and questioned from the highest in the land to the lowest, even in our own homes. When we don't like an answer, we try to get a better one. We hope a new judge, a new jury will cause a different outcome. Sometimes it works and sometimes it does not.

What we have to remember in the case against Jesus was that this was his “cup” or what he had to do in order to save the world. He died to save all of us from sin. He provided a new way for salvation. His death gave us life. There will always be the people who have to follow the many rules we have on earth, but ultimately the outcome is always in God’s hands. Sometimes we have to learn a lesson through the outcome. At times, we have to accept the final outcome. Crucifixion was not the only sentence of the day, but it was reserved for the worst of criminals. Stoning to death was another sentence, not much better at all. Crucifixion as is listed on your complaint as the sentence was what the people or the jury suggested to Pilate. He asked them, and they replied. We always see it depicted in movies of people saying to free Jesus are knocked over the head to silence them. Yes, that still happens. We are silenced many times especially by our peers. We are afraid to voice our opinions. The people then were afraid to make a case for Jesus. It is the burden of proof which is what the hearings and court trials are all about today. The attorneys must prove to the jury without a doubt that the crime was committed, that it was done by a person of sound mind, and that they are to be sentenced accordingly.

Now finally, let’s remember without all of these events where would we be today? Would we still be offering burnt sacrifices to God in our houses of worship? Would we still be waiting for the Messiah? Would Jesus have lived to an old age or just one day decided to return to heaven? It all sounds crazy to contemplate, but one day we too will have a final judgement. We will stand before the great judge, God himself, and accept his judgement whether we can enter the kingdom or be cast below. Live your lives honestly, obey the rule of the land, but remember it is God’s laws as recorded in the Bible that we need to adhere to. Humans make many mistakes in life, but God through the death of Jesus on the cross forgives us of our sins. Jesus had to die on the cross to make our lives the way they are now, don’t take that lightly. All you have to do

to be forgiven is pray. Remember this day, this holy day, as part of the three-day period that ended when Jesus was resurrected on the day, we call Easter. Be thankful and praise God for it is from God that all our blessings flow. Amen.