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Holy Tuesday
26 March 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Mk 14-15

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Barabbas goes free; Jesus is condemned.

In what sort of world does that ever make sense?

Barabbas, Mark tells us, was

“among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection.” (Mk 15:7)

He’s what we’d today call a *terrorist*—

but even that’s too impersonal, too distant for most of us.

He’s like a child pornographer, a serial killer, a rapist, a Hitler or Mussolini or Bin Laden.

He’s repulsive and hasn’t even deserved to live in prison as long as he has.

In contrast, Jesus was known for His healing, and miraculous feeding;
giving sight to the blind and hope to the poor;
teaching peace, even to the wind and waves of creation.

Everyone knows Jesus is good and Barabbas is bad.

In what sort of world does Jesus die and Barabbas goes free?

That’s our world.

That’s what sin looks like at its proudest hour.

No wonder the disciples fled.

Who could blame them?

No wonder Peter denied Him.

If that’s what they’ll do to Jesus—
what will happen to me?

And what about Pilate?

What sort of governor, who clearly sees this whole case to be a sham, would let loose in his region such a threat to society?

The events surrounding Christ’s Passion are confusing.

They make no sense at all.

They show that our world is turned entirely upside down.

While those in authority, the educated and the powerful, ought to get it—
it’s precisely they who are most backward.

But there is one who gets it:

the woman with the alabaster jar.

She knows who this Jesus is—
 not because she's so wise or educated or powerful;
 she knows this only by grace.

She knows that Jesus is worth more than a year's wages all dumped at once.
 Like St. Paul, she knows that everything this world has to offer is rubbish,
 compared with the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.

And what better example of this utter, incomprehensible grace, than Barabbas going free?

Christ died as his substitute.
 Jesus is condemned, Barabbas goes free—
 that's what grace is like.

It's a strange story—sad and sorrowful, to be sure.
 But it's only this sin-infested world that our Lord chose to come by grace.
 Here, in this Passion of Christ the Scriptures are fulfilled.

And this is the greatest mystery of all:
 the evil lust of the crowd, and the apathy of Pilate, are both in accord with the will of God.

The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit desire the death of Christ in the place of Barabbas—
 in the place of Pilate, in the place of Caiaphas, and the Pharisees, and the crowds, and *you*.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit