By My Hand
For My Sake

A SERIES OF SPECIAL SERVICES FOR LENT

by Arden W. Mead
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Lent 3 • Barabbas
Complete Script For Worship Leaders

• The opening litany features responses from Lamentations 1 and 3, and Isaiah 53, and is interrupted by verses sung by the congregation to the tune Martyrdom CM:

Alas! And did my Savior bleed,
And did my Sov’reign die?
Would he devote that sacred head
For sinners such as I?

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

My transgressions are like a yoke about my neck, fastened by the hand of the Lord. They weigh so heavily upon me that my strength is gone. When we lift our hands in prayer to God in heaven, we should offer him our hearts and say, “We have sinned! We have rebelled against you!”

Was it for sins that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown,
And love beyond degree!

Alas! And did my Savior bleed,
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Was it for sins that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown,
And love beyond degree!
He suffered and endured great pain for us, but we thought his suffering was punishment from God.

He was wounded and crushed because of our sins; by taking our punishment, he made us completely well.

All of us were like sheep that had wandered off.

We had each gone our own way,
but the Lord gave him the punishment we deserved.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

• The Prayer Of The Day is offered by the pastor according to local liturgical tradition. Afterwards, this hymn verse is sung by the congregation to the tune Martyrdom CM:

O Hope of ev’ry contrite soul,
O Joy of all the meek,
How kind you are to those who fall,
How good to those who seek!

• This Homily is delivered by the pastor:

Look at your hands. Watch what they can do, these miraculous tools. They can build up—creating wonders of architecture, sculpture and art, warming others with hugs, greeting others with waves, comforting others with caresses. And they can tear down—hitting and hurting, crushing and ... killing. Hands can cause all sorts of harm—from the itchy finger of the gun-toting murderer or the calloused hands of the molester to the delicate fingers of the safe-cracker.

It is rather telling that, when a criminal is captured, the first things bound are the hands. Bind the hands, and you have bound the person.

Look at your hands. Just look at them. And consider the things that they have built ... and the things that they have destroyed.
Do you suppose that Barabbas considered such things? Do you suppose that he saw in his hands the murders he had committed ... the insurrections he had caused ... the blood he had spilled?

Or, do you suppose that all he saw, whenever he looked at his hands, was the mark of missing manacles—the fact that his hands were free.

For, you see, someone else took Barabbas’ place that fateful day. There were no longer any manacles to bind his hands. And there were no nail holes either.

Barabbas may come closer than any of us to the realization of what Jesus’ death on the cross in our place means ... truly, fully, wondrously means. Barabbas, one hopes, may have understood the full weight of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Because, if it had not been Jesus, it truly would have been Barabbas up there—naked, pierced, bloody, dying.

Look at your hands. Look at them. And take note of this—there are no manacles there. There are no nail holes.

Jesus died in your place. He died for you!

- A Hymn of your own choosing may be sung by the congregation.

- The Old Testament Lesson, Isaiah 12:1-6, read by a reader:

You will say in that day: “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.” With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: “Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”
• This Responsory from Psalm 38 is shared between a reader and the congregation:

God, in your great anger do not chastise or punish me.
Your arrows have struck deep; your hand weighs heavily upon me.
Because of your rage, my flesh wastes away.
Because of my sin, my bones grow brittle.
I am bent by guilt, burdened by the load; my wounds reek and fester.
Broken by folly, I walk in sorrow, grieving all the day long.
My flesh burns, consumed by fever.
Bruised and stamped upon, I cry out, groaning from the heart.
Lord, you see all secrets, you hear my sighs.
My heart breaks, all my strength has fled, even my eyes grow dim.
God, do not leave me alone. Do not abandon me.
Come, quickly save me, O God, my God.

• The New Testament Lesson, Romans 5:6-11, 18-19, is read by a reader:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

• The Barabbas Monolog is delivered:

*If your worship includes The Old Rugged Cross, carry in a chain (or something similar to indicate a prisoner’s manacles), place it on the cross. Spend a long moment looking at it there, perhaps reaching out to touch it, before beginning your monolog.*
That should be my cross, you know. The center one. I should be hanging there, surrounded by the crowds who’ve gathered here—the women, priests and Pharisees, a follower perhaps, and those curious, calloused onlookers who seem to enjoy beholding death by crucifixion. I should be there!

Right now, though, I’m not sure I even want to be here, where I might be seen, recognized—lest someone try to throw me back into prison again. Ah, but that can’t happen, don’t you see? For I am free! That cross is his, not mine, and I am free. Because of him. Because he took my place there on the cross. I think they call him … Jesus.

And they call me … oh, yes, they called me … so loudly, so enthusiastically they called my name: “BARABBAS! Give us Barabbas!” That’s why I am here, at the foot of the cross. Because I shouldn’t be here. I should be running and hiding in the hills, running for my life.

My life! That’s what it’s all about, this crucifixion, this man’s untimely death. It’s all about my life. Today I was to die. That cross was made for me; those nails were mine. But, at the very last minute, I was released!

Maybe I need to go back a little and tell you how I got into prison in the first place. It was no surprise to many that I ended up there. As a kid I was brash, loud-mouthed, leader of the gang … and I liked it. If there was mischief, I was there. Things didn’t get better through my teen years. By the time I reached adulthood, someone had said to me, “Hey, you want some real excitement? We have a cause; a group of us are doing something about those Romans in our land. They are enemies of our God and our people! Our group, the Zealots, is tired of just talking, praying, waiting. We have gathered a band of patriots, brave, unafraid. And look, if we can show the other men of Israel what just a few can do—a few brave patriots—the rest will follow. Raid! Strike! Kill if we must! And we need fearless men like you!”

“Like you,” I heard them say, and I joined. I followed where they led, and soon … I led! Daring, brash, and calloused, I led the attacks. We hit and ran. We plundered and stole. And all in the name of the Father, our God. And things were going just as we had hoped until someone … someone betrayed us. Plans … a huge caravan headed for Rome. Money, treasures,
goods of all kinds—there would be enough plunder to raise a small army! I was in charge … but someone had betrayed us. They were waiting for us. And what was most obvious: they were after me. “Barabbas!” Apparently my name had struck terror in many hearts, and they wanted me. I fought. My sword cut, struck, and killed. And then … everything went black, and I awoke … in that prison cell.

Now, less than a week later—today—as I was lying there … I knew. They had wasted no time. Today was the day. They wanted to make an example of me. Crucifixion! What really hurt was that many of my own people agreed. They too saw me as an outlaw and murderer. Out there, they were making three crosses. Two men in cells beside me, they also knew. It was today for them too. They were calling out for mercy, scared. But not me. I would not crawl and plead. I would be the brave patriot to the very end.

I heard the steps, armed guards. This was it! They grabbed me, pulled me from the cell. It wasn’t until then that it hit me: crucifixion!!! I have seen it; it is a terrifying way to die!

But wait … they dragged me past the crosses … up the stairs … to the governor’s balcony. Voices … I could hear the voices … a crowd … loud, crazy people. And then I saw … him. I had heard about him. A roving prophet? A miracle worker? A peace maker? He was going to “bring in the kingdom of God,” his people said. “With what?” we wondered, daggers ready. “With words,” they said. Words!

He stood beside me now. “Which one will you have?” Pilate called out, “Barabbas? Or Jesus?” Did I hear correctly? Pilate is asking them to choose between us? The irony of the situation did not escape me, even in the confusion of the moment. In a way, we shared a title, shared a claim—to be sons of the Father. That’s what he, Jesus, had claimed to be, so I had been told. And that’s what I was as well. My name, Barabbas—it means “Son of the Father.” Which “Son of the Father” would they release? What a choice! They know who I am, and that frightens me. And him? He’s harmless. Which one will they choose? Which one would you have chosen? Of course … it’s obvious: the true and righteous choice was … him! And me? Captured, condemned, what would become of me?
“Barabbas! Barabbas!” Listen to them cry! “Give us Barabbas!” And just that quickly the command: “Set him free.” My hands, unmanacled ... my feet, cut loose. FREE! I AM FREE!

Need I tell you I ran? As I came down through those halls, another roaring cry arose, a cry that stopped me in my tracks. What? Did I hear them right? “Crucify him!” they roared. “Crucify him!” I was free, but the other “Son of the Father”—docile, silent—he was going to die ... in my place ... for me. Oh, let those words sink in: FOR ME!!!

Do you know what it feels like to be able to say that? And to know that it is true? That should be my cross, you know. I should be hanging there. Do you know how it feels to have somebody take your place—somebody innocent, when you are guilty? Do you know what it means to be named a child of the Father? Do you know what it is to be free?

If your worship includes The Old Rugged Cross, at the end of the monolog, go to the cross and begin to remove the chain. But then stop ... and put it back ... and leave it there as you depart, obviously relieved.

• This Hymn is sung by the congregation to the tune Southwell SM:

  Our Savior speaks in grace,
  With words of mercy true:
  “Forgive them, Father,” thus he prays;
  “They know not what they do.”

  Now hear the awful cry,
  Sin’s dreadful burden see.
  “My God, my God,” the Son shouts, “why
  Have you forsaken me?”

  Beneath the cross may I,
  For whom all this was done,
  Repentant and believing cry,
  “This truly is God’s Son!”
• These Prayers are offered by the pastor:

For our sakes, O God, and in our place, your holy Son stood trial. For our sakes his hands were harshly tied. For our sakes he was condemned to death and took our punishment. He died for us. For his sake, we are free!

What shall we do with the freedom you have given us in Jesus Christ, O God? How shall we use our hands? Show us the work you would have us to do, the challenges you place before us, the needs that can be met by the raising of our hands

— to help undo the wrongs which we behold on every hand,
— to work for peace and justice in the world, and in our families and community,
— to reach out our hands to comfort the grieving, heal the sick, strengthen the weak, restore the wandering, and welcome those whom your Holy Spirit places in our care …

Until we stand, forgiven and unshackled, at the judgment seat of him who took our place in death that we might live, to make all who believe in him children of the Father—Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

• The Offering is gathered as this Verse is sung by the congregation to the tune Gethsemane 77 77 77:

Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed his blood for me,
Died that I might live on high,
Lives that I might never die.
As the branch is to the vine,
I am his, and he is mine.

• The Lord’s Prayer is offered according to local custom.
• This or another Benediction is delivered by the pastor:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

Amen.

• This Verse is sung by the congregation to the tune Gethsemane 77 77 77:

Peace, to soothe our bitter woes,
God in Christ on us bestows;
Jesus bought our peace with God
With his holy, precious blood;
Peace in him for sinners found
Is the Gospel’s joyful sound.