

Sunday April 2, 2023

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

As we begin our service of worship this morning let's remind ourselves of the great God we are coming before & so begin with a reading from Psalm 46. *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her; she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."* (NIV)

Let us pray... "God our Refuge, when human resources fail, you alone remain our sure hope and defence. In the knowledge of your love, grant us courage. We place ourselves in your hands, confident that nothing can separate us from your love. We praise you for Jesus, the Living One, the First and the Last, who was dead, but now is forever alive. Help us, who have not seen, to believe; send us, as you have sent Jesus, to greet the world with your words of hope, life and peace and to share with all the Spirit's new life of forgiveness. We ask through the Lord Jesus, our Passover and our Peace, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Song – The Chorus of the Saved <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilpVNCSOH8k>

1. See the radiance of God Risen Son
All the angels rejoice at his name
All creation sustained by the power of his word
And his throne will endure for now and ever

2. Perfect Son sacrificed once for all
Power of sin, fear of death now destroyed
Raised to life, raised on high,
Jesus name above all names
His acclaim will resound beyond the ages

Chorus

Come join the song
in earth and heaven voices raised
In the chorus of the saved
Come shout his name,
come lift a sacrifice of praise
With the chorus of the saved

3. Through his blood our forgiveness is sure
By his Spirit within we'll endure
Holding on to this hope
as an anchor for the soul
And our eyes fixed on Jesus
the one who saves us

Chorus

Bridge

Now let us draw near the holiest place
Our hearts full of faith,
our lips full of praise
So let us draw near
the holiest place
Now pure through his blood,
our sins washed away

Chorus

Bible Reading – Matthew 26:57-75 (NIV)

"Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the

elders had assembled. ⁵⁸ But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. ⁵⁹ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰ But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally, two came forward ⁶¹ and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" ⁶² Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ "You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him ⁶⁸ and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?" ⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. ⁷¹ Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" ⁷³ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." ⁷⁴ Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Announcements 2/4/23

Focus for April – Easter. As we approach Easter it is important that we again come to grips with the importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Without it our faith is futile and we are still lost in our sins. Please try and spend some extra time this week, prayerfully reading one of the gospel accounts of the last week of Jesus life. What Jesus has done for us is truly amazing & we should always live in the light of it.

Easter Fun Day – Sun 2 Apr: Join us TODAY after church from 11:45-1:45 for games, sausage sizzle, craft, Easter egg hunt & more! Cost \$4 pp or \$10 per family. Guest free.

Prayer Meetings – This week we are inviting EVERYONE to join us in prayer as a preparation for Easter and to bring to our Lord the big issues facing us as a Church. To that end we are closing all our small groups down so that as many people as possible might be able to attend. Our prayer meetings will be on Tuesday 4th April (BYO dinner 6:45pm, Prayer from 7:30pm) and Wednesday 5th April (BYO Lunch 12:30pm, Prayer from 1:30pm). There is so much to pray about! We want to keep the Lord at the forefront of all that we do.

Easter Service

Last Supper Service	Thursday 6 th April	4:30pm (Swansea), 6pm (Charlestown)
Good Friday	Friday 7 th April	8am (Swansea), 9:45am (Charlestown)
Resurrection Sunday	Sunday 9 th April	8am (Swansea), 9:45am & 6pm (Charlestown)

Congregational Meetings. Many thanks to everyone who came and participated in last week's annual meeting. It was a good time for questions, comments and unity. The following decisions were made

- Elected Mal Wardrop as a new elder
- Elected Caleb Gillard, Letitia Wigney, Ean Sutton, Debi Tunnicliffe & Stuart Blanch to the Committee of management with power to add up to 3 others.
- Approved the Church Building Redevelopment project with \$1.2 million budget and approval to apply for a \$500,000 loan from the Church Trustees.
- Elected a Construction Working Group of Ross Logan, Chris Laity, Stuart Blanch, Annette Phillis, Cheryl Gillard, plus one to be added, chaired by Stephen Taylor.
- Elected a Mercy Ministries Team of Matt James, Jo Barlow, Robynne Wardrop & Karen Logan.
- Noted that in November 2023 the Charlestown congregation will turn 100 years.

- Thanked all our hard-working staff and volunteers for doing a great job.

Regular Activities. Over the school holidays our regular activities will go into recess. If you would like to serve in any way in Term 2, we would love to hear from you.

Bible Reading – Matthew 27:1-30 (NIV)

27 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. 2 So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor. 3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. 8 That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, 10 & they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me." 11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied. 12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" 14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. 15 Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18 For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him. 19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." 20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. 22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" 23 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" 25 All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. 27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Pastoral Prayer Points

Pray for Afghanistan: Continue to pray for hope, stability and safety for Afghans - especially Christians. Afghanistan has now overtaken North Korea as the world's worst persecutor of Christians.

Pray for our communities: Pray for the many people who remain dead in their sins, imprisoned by Satan's deception. Pray the Lord would show His power, grace and mercy to the people of Newcastle by redeeming the lost by Word and Spirit.

Pray for our church: Pray that we would be faithful witnesses to the truth. Pray for wisdom and understanding, that we would know God's word and be able to communicate it with others. Pray for peace

and unity within our church and among all the churches that believe the gospel. Pray division would not taint the message of peace.

Song – Nothing but the blood of Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4Sd5BL4j0A>

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus</p> | <p>3. This is all my hope and peace
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
This is all my righteousness
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
Chorus</p> |
| <p>2. For my pardon this I see
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
For my cleansing this my plea
Nothing but the blood of Jesus</p> | <p>4. Glory, glory this I see
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
All my praise for this I bring
Nothing but the blood of Jesus</p> |

*Chorus: Oh! Precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus*

Sermon – The flesh is weak! - Stephen T

Last month Scott White pleaded guilty in the NSW Supreme Court to murdering Scott Johnson giving the Johnson family justice 35 years after the death of their loved one. You see in 1988, the 27-year-old mathematician was found dead at the bottom of a Sydney cliff. It seemed to have all the marks of a gay hate crime but the police investigation didn't find any evidence as to foul play. In fact, a coronial inquest soon after decided that Johnson had taken his own life.

But the family saw this as a miscarriage of justice. They pressured the government for another inquest and in 2012 a second coroner found there was insufficient evidence to determine how Johnson had died. In 2020 Johnson's brother offered a reward of \$1million for information that led to an arrest. A third coronial inquest was arranged, then an arrest, a trial and now finally a guilty verdict – Scott White was convicted of the offense. But he maintained his innocence and on appeal his conviction was overturned. But in February 2023 he admitted to the murder of Scott Johnson much to the relief of the family.

Slide 2

You see justice is important. Justice is worth fighting for. And after 35 years of fighting, Johnson's family now have justice. It doesn't bring their loved one back. It doesn't take away the pain of their loss. But it means that the person who did this horrible crime, is finally getting a just punishment.

Justice. It's one of the planks that our society is built upon. It's a belief that is extremely important to us. We need to deal with one another in the right manner. If someone has wronged society, they need to pay for their crimes. If someone is innocent, they should be able to walk free. And all of us need to have our rights upheld by the law.

Slide 3

But when we turn to the last day or so of Jesus life, when we read the accounts in Matthew 26 & 27 of the last few hours of Jesus life, the word that keeps shouting out to us is the INNOCENCE. Matthew 27:4 Judas admits "I have **betrayed innocent** blood." Pilate is told by his wife in Matthew 27:19 "don't have anything to do with that **innocent man**." Pilate himself asks the crowds "**What crime has he committed?**" And at the end of the ordeal, he washes his hands in front of the crowd saying "I am **innocent** of this man's blood." This part of Gospel tells us that Jesus was innocent so we are reading an account of firstly

1. Injustice

For justice was important to the Jews in Jesus time. They knew that they served a God of justice. They had been brought up on the OT Scriptures that talked about the importance of obeying God's law and about how judges needed to act impartially and not take bribes. That whether you were the richest man in the country or the poorest one that you should be treated exactly the same in a court of law. Justice was very, very important to the Jews.

But they were not in complete control of the courts in Jesus' time. They were a province of the great Roman empire. But fortunately, Rome loved justice as well. The Romans were sticklers for rules, they had an elaborate court system. For their own people they even had an appeal system that went over and above the local ruler. So, justice was important to both the Jews and the Romans.

And yet when we look at how Jesus was treated just prior to his death by both the Jews and the Romans, we see that the justice system failed Jesus. It let him down badly. He actually had 6 trials in the space of around 9 hours. 6 trials where not one of them was fair. That's terrible injustice.

Injustice firstly at the Sanhedrin, the highest religious court in the land. Here the priests, the scribes and the religious leaders met to determine Jesus' fate. Now this court had an elaborate set of rules that were there in order to ensure justice. Let me give you just some of them that applied to capital trials. No night trials. A verdict had to be confirmed the next day. There should be a private interrogation of all witnesses. The defendant needed to have a lawyer to represent them. Trials needed to be held in the Temple precinct, not a private home. And executions could not take place around the important feast days like Passover.

Slide 5

But none of these laws were followed in Jesus' trial. Why was that? ⁵⁹ *"The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were **looking for false evidence** against Jesus so that they could put him to death."* They were looking for evidence that backed up the decision they had already decided to make! ⁶⁰ *"But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward."*

Sometimes you see on the news a show trial in totalitarian countries where they just go through the motions but the verdict, guilty has already been determined. That's what was happening in this case. But they were having trouble finding any evidence to convict Jesus.

Slide 6

"Finally, two came forward ⁶¹ and declared, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" ⁶² *Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"* Jesus didn't need to answer because the other gospels say the witnesses' stories did not agree. The evidence was not worth answering, in Jesus' mind.

Slide 7

It's a sham. The Sanhedrin are clutching at straws. It's a kangaroo court. But then Caiaphas the high priest does something highly irregular and manifestly unjust. His job as a high priest is to be the chief justice but he becomes the chief prosecutor. So, he takes control of the trial *"I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."*

Can you image that happening today? The judge demanding that the defendant tell them under oath whether they are guilty or not? Well, that is what happens here. Under oath Jesus tells them that he is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Suddenly the charges against Jesus are changed mid trial to blaspheme. But there is no consideration as to whether what he is saying is true. There are no witnesses

called, Lazarus perhaps? The widow of Nain? Malchus? The servant of the high priest who just a few hours earlier had been healed by Jesus. No-one.

The youngest to the oldest should have cast their verdict but Caiaphas does it for them. *“He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered.”*

Slide 8

You see there was no justice for Jesus in the Jewish court system. But it gets worse. The one witness who could have stood up for Jesus, Peter, denies him three times and leaves in tears. Another disciple Judas returns with the money the chief priests bribed him with, saying “I have betrayed innocent blood!” I got it wrong. You have it wrong. And the chief priests don’t want to have a bar of him. Or his evidence. So, Judas in a fit of remorse throws the 30 pieces of silver into the temple. There is no justice for Jesus from his disciples.

To make things worse, do you notice what the chief priests do next? They follow the law. This is blood money. The law says we can’t have anything to do with it. So, they use it to buy a field as a burial place for foreigners. They are straining out the gnat & drinking the camels, aren’t they? They have just condemned an innocent man doing whatever they can because the ends justify the means & now, now they want to again follow the law. What hypocrites!

What injustice. But the Romans will fix things up, won’t they? Jesus is then sent to the Roman Governor, Pilate. He interrogates Jesus, he listens to the arguments of the Jewish leader and we read in verse 18 that he knows what’s happening here. ¹⁸ *“For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.”* Pilate knows what is happening, he wasn’t born yesterday. But he was in the horns of a dilemma.

He knew Jesus was innocent. His wife has a dream and sends him a message telling him that she believes Jesus is innocent but the pressure from the Sanhedrin is enormous. That’s when he makes a tactical blunder, maybe he can get the crowd to his dirty work for him.

Slide 9

¹⁷ *“So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”... ²⁰ “But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas & to have Jesus executed. ²¹ “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered. ²² “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” ²³ “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”*

Slide 10

²⁴ *“When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!” ²⁵ All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!” ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”*

You get it, the Romans don’t give Jesus’ justice either. The crowd doesn’t want justice. So, Pilate hands him over to the Romans soldiers and they mock him. They are meant to protect and defend the innocent. Instead, they whip him, they take off his cloak, that would be like ripping off a band aid off a wound after the flogging, then put a crown of thorns on his head, dress him up as a king, mocked him again & beat him. This is humanity at its absolute worse.

Slide 11

In the words of commentator William Hendriksen’s *“Consider what he had already endured within the last fifteen hours; the tense atmosphere of the Upper Room, the betrayal by Judas, the agonies of Gethsemane, the desertion by His disciples, the totally hypocritical trial before the Sanhedrin, the mockery in the palace*

of Caiaphas, the denial of His most prominent disciple, the trial before an unjust judge, the terrible ordeal of being scourged, the pronouncement of a death sentence upon him, and the seven-itemed abuse by the soldiers in the praetorium. Humanly speaking, it's a wonder at all that He was able to carry the cross"

Slide 12

No justice from the Romans, the Jews, the crowds, the disciples or the law keepers. So how does Jesus react to this total injustice? But with total, silent suffering. Now Jesus had always treated others with justice and dignity. He stepped in to uphold the rights of others. But no one did it for him. And friends that is just what our world is like.

This world is full of injustice. The rich can pay for the top KC and barristers and often get off on a technicality. Whereas the poor are often downtrodden. It is not just the family of Scott Johnson's that plead for justice. What about the Biloela family, Priya and Nades? What about the other asylum seekers? What about the rape victims, the abuse victims, and all those others who have failed to get justice in this country, let alone in other countries.

Slide 13

2. Injustice but then Justice.

For God's not going to take that lying down, is he? God may delay our justice until he comes and again where he will right all wrongs, but He won't wait until judgement day to right the wrong of his Son Jesus, will he? He will come down and wipe those guys off the face of the earth, won't He? He will send 10,000 angels to overturn such a corrupt government, won't He? He will defend his one and only son, the only man who has ever lived a perfect life by overturning the injustice and giving him justice. That's what he will do next, won't He?

Well in the rest of the chapter, we see that God does enter the story. God Himself does come down & by his actions we do see that he is indeed a God of Justice. That he won't turn a blind eye to sin. He won't let the world be filled to the brim with injustice. So yes, he does send justice to Jesus, but he does it in a very surprising way. In a shocking way, in fact!

Slide 14

God abandons his Messiah. God forsakes His one & only son. God turns his face & presents only his back to His chosen one. And so, we hear that anguished cry from Jesus hanging on the cross, "*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani.*" *My God, my God why have you forsaken me?*" Isn't this God adding insult to injury? Isn't this Jesus receiving even more injustice? Isn't God just joining the queue of those who have treated Jesus unjustly? No. No. No. NO!

For this injustice, this suffering is part of the God's plan. Hatched between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yes, the trials of Jesus were unjust but the cross of Christ is not a tragedy, it is not a miscarriage of justice, but it's God's plan, worked out before the creation of the world for Jesus to get the justice that you and I deserve.

For the role of the Messiah was not just to teach people about God. The role of the King was to lead his people back to God & the thing that stops people from being in God's Kingdom is their sin. So, Jesus, the Messiah, the perfect one, took our sin on his shoulders. He swapped his righteousness for our wrongdoing. On that cross he takes the punishment that was due to us. So, when Jesus is on that cross, with my sin, with your sin, on his shoulders. With the injustice of the Jews and the Romans on his frame. With the corruption and deceit and faithlessness of all those around him on his body. God gives Jesus the justice he desires.

God abandons his Son. He gives him the death that is the wages for our sin. He sends him to hell to take the just punishments for these sins. He deals with them justly, so that the desire of the Messiah is taken

into account. He takes our place getting the death that we deserve so that we can take his place and get the life that he deserved.

Slide 15

A few years ago, the Chicago Sun Times pictured on its front page a picture of a couple at a table kissing, below the caption, "Roderick A Hinson gets a snack & a smack from Jacqueline Y Nash." In the article, it explained that Roderick had just come out from serving a 3-day jail sentence for possession of an unregistered gun. But it wasn't his jail sentence at all, it was actually hers! You see Jacqueline had been found with the unregistered gun but Roderick decided that jail was not a good place for a lady and so he had asked the judge if he could substitute himself for his partner. The judge then considered the matter and agreed that even though it was highly unusual, that substitution was perfectly legal.

Likewise, Jesus substitutes himself for the Jews, the Romans, the crowds, the disciples, all those who gave him injustice and even for us here in Lake Macquarie in 2023. And God seeing those sins on his shoulders gives Jesus the justice that he desires. Death for the sinless Messiah. Life for sinful substitute.

Slide 16

It's a bit like the true story of the man who was arrested and taken to court because he stole a loaf of bread. And when the judge investigated the reasons why he found out that the man had no job and his family were hungry. The man had tried again and again to get work but when he couldn't he felt he had no alternative but to steal the bread.

The judge felt sorry for the man but apologised to him and said, "I'm sorry but the law can make no exceptions. You stole and therefore I have to punish you. I order you to pay a fine of \$10, which was quite a lot of money in those days. He then continues but I am choosing to pay the fine on your behalf and so he reached into his wallet and pulled out the \$10 and handed it to the bailiff. Then the judge says "I now want to remit the fine" which meant the bailiff gave the \$10 to the accused. Furthermore, I am fining everyone in this courtroom 50c for living in a city where a man has to steal in order to have bread to eat for his family.

That's what happens to Jesus at the cross. God sends his justice onto his son but the guilty end up receiving the gift of eternal life and all the blessings that come from living in the world that God has made for his sons and daughters.

Slide 17

3. Injustice, Justice and finally Mercy.

For that is what is happening in Matt 27. In the midst of man's injustice & God's justice we also see God shares with the world his wonderful mercy. For on the cross we hear those great words of Jesus "*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*" Forgiveness is available to sinners. Jesus doesn't give us an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth but responds to all that is thrown at him by offering us forgiveness. How amazing is that?

And then when Jesus dies, in verse 51 we read "*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*" The curtain that surrounded the most holy place in the Temple, the place where God was meant to dwell was torn from top to bottom. The place that no one was meant to go into, except the high priest who went in there once a year with the lamb of atonement was now open and exposed to everyone. We can now have access to God through the death of Jesus. We can now live life always in God's presence.

And what happens next? "*The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.*"

Slide 18

God's mercy is giving people life! Not death but life after death. These people were dead but they get to live again. So, there is not just forgiveness, not just access to God's presence but life, life to the full, eternal life. How wonderful is God's mercy. In the midst of injustice, he hatches a plan to offer the world life, and hope and a forgiveness and a future. And that's why we are in Church today. To celebrate the wonderful mercy of God. To remember that we deserved justice but instead got mercy. We deserved death but instead we got life. We deserved separation from God but instead got 24/7 access to God.

Slide 19

But that just reminds me of another true story, the story of George Wilson. Wilson, one day boarded a train, forced the guard to open up a certain carriage containing the payroll for the US government. He then took the money and killed the guard. And in 1830 he was convicted, condemned for his crime and sentenced to death by hanging. But the next year there was pressure on the President, Andrew Jackson to reverse all form of capital punishment. And in this instance, Jackson agreed and issued George Wilson a pardon. But there was a problem. George Wilson didn't want to take his Presidents pardon. He wanted to die. It ended up in the Supreme Court where the Judge said, a pardon is a piece of paper & it only has any power if it is received. It has not been received, so Wilson will die.

Do you get that a pardon only has power if it is received. And God's pardon for your sins is the same. You have to receive it. In the midst of a world full of injustice, God has a plan to offer you forgiveness, life and eternal access to Himself but you have got to take it. Or it will do you no good. You must acknowledge it was my sins that put him there on the cross. And Jesus has paid for that sin. So, I am now willing to repent of my sin. Trust in my sin bearer Jesus and live for him and him alone.

Slide 20

For friends one day, the one who was mocked by the crowds, will have people from every nation giving him worship. And whereas he once wore a soldiers scarlet robe we will soon see him adorned with the long robe of the priest king. He once had a crown of thorns; he is currently wearing a crown of gold. He once had a bamboo cane in his hand now he has a mighty sceptre which is a sign of his universal authority. The injuries and insults which came to Jesus reveal to us that he is the true servant of God. But he is now the servant King, the one that we are called to serve for the rest of our lives. Despite living in a world of injustice and pain and suffering, we can today live for Jesus. The one who turns death into life. Injustice into mercy. For God's mercy is more precious than anything, anything we will get this Easter.

Song – His mercy is more <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAa2C1yoQ-0>

1. What love could remember
no wrongs we have done
Omniscient, all knowing,
He counts not their sum
Thrown into a sea
without bottom or shore
Our sins they are many,
His mercy is more

2. What patience would wait
as we constantly roam
What Father, so tender,
is calling us home
He welcomes the weakest,
the vilest, the poor
Our sins they are many,
His mercy is more

Chorus x2
Praise the Lord, His mercy is more
Stronger than darkness, new every morn
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more

3. What riches of kindness
He lavished on us
His blood was the payment,
His life was the cost
We stood 'neath a debt
we could never afford
Our sins they are many,
His mercy is more

Chorus x2