

Scene 4 Living with tension

In this scene, Pilate washes his hands of the responsibility for Jesus' fate, and leaves a decision up to the crowd. In this pandemic, we have experienced being under government regulations and guidelines, and also been trusted to use our judgement. This week, we consider how to respond in times where we may not agree with decisions made by others on our behalf, and how we respond when others seem to flout or bend the rules. How have we found ways to live with this tension?

The courtyard – Mark 15.6-15

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.



Voices

Here Family member of someone shielding

I can't understand what goes on in people's minds. When all of this started, we were all in this together – clapping for keyworkers, wearing our masks, staying home to protect one another. How quickly things can change, though this last year's been a hard one. It's all very well to say forget the rules, that officials don't know what they're talking about, we'll do what we want, it's a free country! What about those of us who have someone vulnerable to protect? No immune system means no defence against the common cold, let alone a deadly virus! Weak chests, cancer treatments, bowel disease, old age – there are so many people having to be so careful. This is the most crucial time – relaxing the rules, letting our guards down, breathing a sigh of relief because the worst is over – not for those with chronic illnesses! It's been difficult all the way along, let's be honest, having to abide by rules set by other people – whether you agree or disagree with them, it's not always been easy for anyone, we all have a lot to lose but for some of us, the odds are stacked against us. When people say a mask isn't just to protect you, it protects others from you, it really is galling when that one's ignored! I've had to find some sense of rhythm in all this, some way of coming to terms with living under constant risk – the strain of worry is draining – although some precautions now are second nature after all this time. I no longer have to think about sanitising my hands when I enter a shop; I automatically pat my pocket for keys and face-covering when I leave the house now. But dealing with other people's decisions and the consequences of them, that's more difficult to live with.

There Widow of Barabbas' victim

I can't understand what goes on in people's minds. When all of this started, we were all in this together – I was there with the rest of them, waving palm branches, laying cloaks on the road and shouting to welcome the newcomer into town, what was it – a few days ago? Oh, how quickly things can change. Now the crowd is baying for that man's blood, and what's he done? Upset the Pharisees? Said a few things they don't like? What's that compared with murder? Compared with tearing lives apart, taking husbands from wives and fathers from children? Barabbas killed my Saul. He was eventually put away for it – took long enough – but I thought I could finally sleep at night knowing he was locked away. But no, they chose him over that man Jesus – they chose to release a murderer over a religious teacher! I would laugh if it didn't hurt so much. Now no one's safe, and me and my children have to live with whatever happens next because of someone else's poor judgement! What were they thinking?! Are they just going with the crowd? Trying to please – who? Is this a political statement against this Jesus character? What could possibly justify setting a known killer loose? It's hard enough to be grieving for my husband, but dealing with the consequences of other people's decisions, that's more difficult to live with.

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Reflection and conversation

- 1 How do you personally respond to: a) government guidelines you may not agree with; b) other people flouting restrictions; c) people you disagree with in a wider context?
- 2 What do you think may have been the implications for anyone who stood up against Pilate's judgement in the crowd?
- 3 Can we or should we find ways of trusting and living with other's decisions?

Listen

[Behold he comes](#) Rend Collective

[Man of sorrows](#) The Celebration Choir

Prayer action

If you have a disposable face mask, consider writing 'I wear this to show I care' across the front, and display it on a mantelpiece or somewhere prominent, to remind you that in part the reason we wear masks is to protect others as well as ourselves. Reflect on other areas of your life where your actions protect or care for others, and how this may adapt or develop once restrictions are lifted.

Wise and all-knowing God, we cannot fathom how others think, and we cannot see the full picture that you can see. Please guide us, give us discernment and courage as we learn when to stand up and contest something, and when to try and live together with tension. Give us your heart for justice, and your patience to make it happen, we pray. Amen.

Follow-up activity

Create a 'worry box'. Through this week, write down anything playing on your mind on a slip of paper, fold it up and pray over it, then place it into a worry box and entrust it to God. You may end up placing the same worry in the box again and again, but practise giving your concerns over to God.