RASCALS AROUND THE CROSS

We often think of Holy Week as a week of Saints – but it was also a week of scoundrels –
There were then and there still are – a lot of rascals around the cross.

As the four Gospels paint their pictures of the crucifixion, these dark figures in the
periphery serve – by Ruskin’s law of contrast – to bring out the light in the life of the central
figure Jesus the Christ. Their rascality serves to reveal more clearly his rightness. Their
presence during Holy Week – throws His mission into sharp relief.

I suppose the rascals among us in the Church today – still perform this function – these
persons’ dark attitudes and ways make the light of Jesus Christ stand out even clearer. As their
dark fears and hates and greeds contrast with the light of his faith and love and grace – as we
draw back from them, we are drawn closer to Him. Such is the function of the rascal in religion.

Certainly in that original Holy Week – these dark figures were legion – the Gospels
portray a regular rally of rascals – a whole chorus of antagonists: all in contrast to and in conflict
with Jesus Christ.

For example, there was Herod, the Prince – rich, sensate, whose religion (if he had any)
was rank superstition.

Two, there was Caiaphus, the Prelate, high priest, chairman of the board of trustees,
moderator of the Sanhedrin, whose religion (if he had any) was largely institutional.

Three, there was Iscariot, the Pragmatist – country boy – come “nawth” – to make his
way – whose only requirement of religion (as of everything else) was that it pay – and pay well.

Four, and there were many more rascals around the cross. You can spot them easily –
Pilate, Roman soldiers, thieves and scattered disciples – all of whose lives serve to throw into
sharp relief the life of our Lord – but we shall concentrate on only three:

a. Herod the Prince
b. Caiaphas the Prelate
c. And Iscariot the Pragmatist

[Note: Several pages of original manuscript are missing. It may be that they have been lost, but
it appears that Dr. Bennett abandoned them and added the remaining material.]
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William C. Bennett
Trinity Ave. Presbyterian Church

As I said at the beginning – in that original Holy Week, dark figures were legion – rascals all around the cross. Herod the Prince, Caiaphus the Prelate and (the lost for today – I’m tired too), Iscariot, the Pragmatist, country boy come “nawth” to make his way – whose only requirement of religion – as of everything else – was that it pay and pay well –

Call his name ‘Judas’ for that’s what it was. And don’t you damn that name either – good name that was – “Judas” – religious name (meant “praise” of God) – patriotic name (borne by the father of his country) like being named, say, “John Wesley Washington” today. Came from a good country town too – Kerioth (prophets came from there) – so don’t you down that name – “Judas Iscariot” – that’s a good name – trouble is, the man who bore it hurt that good name himself – damaged it irreparably – banked it up beyond repair – marred it so – that since the day he took his life – no mother (in her right senses) ever named her baby that again – no more Judas Iscariots in this work ever again – at least, not in name.

With such a good beginning – good hometown and all that who do you suppose went wrong with that boy? What caused him to steal that money from the bag – And him the treasurer of the band? What caused him to sell his leader to the enemy for the price of a slave? For just 30 silver pieces? That wasn’t enough to make him do a thing like that! And the kiss he [gave] to point him out? What was that for? Revenge? Revenge for what?

Was he disappointed in his Jesus friend – expected great things from him and didn’t get ‘em? Expected that Jesus would raise an army? Make Judas, “General Judas” and throw the Romans in the sea? What did he expect him to do? Legislate a new life in Israel – free the slaves, divide up the big estates – political, social, economic reform? Land reform?

Is this the [reward] he expected the religion of Jesus to pay?

There – was he disillusioned, disgusted with Jesus’ talk of humility, sacrifice, death? Talk of life in a better world to come? What about this world? Master? What about this world?

So he tried to force the leader’s hand? Is that it? Make him declare himself king – here and now – not in some vague hereafter?

But when he failed – failed – then [victim] of his own sin – takes his own life? Traitor to history – good name – good start – but it’s not how you begin your life that counts – it’s how you end it.

And Judas Iscariot ended his – how? Everyone knows. “Is it I, Rabbi?” Yes, it is.
Poor Judas, poor, poor Judas.

True religion – a Judas – never pays – never pays off – in any sort of coin you can count – Christ never yet gave a man anything – but Himself – God only gives us himself – a quality of life called eternal – and how can you count that? So you don’t buy – can’t sell Christ – for any amount of silver.

He comes of his own free will and lodges in a human heart – not by legislation – just by grace.

Of course, you can shut him out if you want to – when he draws close – and offers you life – his life – offers you forgiveness, love, peace – call it what you will –

You like Herod sunk in his senses

Like Caiaphus lost in his institution

Like Iscariot – who would even [betray] to pay –

You, too, can shudder when he gets too close to you – and move your lips – and say to him, “Go, and come no more…come not at all, never, never!” and Christ will go away.

And life will go away with him – but why not let him stay?

Why not let him come and lodge with you and give you:

Himself

Freedom of life

The quiet life

The good life

The kind life

The clean life

And peace at last.

There are already too many rascals around the cross.

“Behold,” he says,

“I stand at the door and knock,

If any man will hear my voice and open the door,

I will come and sup with him.”