

John 18:33-38

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”³⁴ “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”³⁶ Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”³⁷ “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”³⁸ “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.

Forgive Us When We Abandon Your Truths

1. We sometimes think God’s truths don’t fit into our lives
2. Jesus continues to bring saving truth into our lives

The ancient Romans prided themselves on their eloquence. If you were to study ancient Roman culture, you would most certainly study the great Roman orators, public speakers who delivered persuasive addresses. Romans loved to debate topics like politics and philosophy, and naturally a debater was more influential if he was able to speak in a clear and powerful way. The Romans of the ancient world were famous for the speeches which they made.

How ironic then, that in an age long since the days of the Roman Empire’s power, the most famous thing ever said by any Roman is only three words long. The speeches of Cicero and Caesar by and large have been forgotten, but the words of Pontius Pilate live on. “What is truth?”

Pontius Pilate reveals that he didn’t have time for God’s truth. Truth is that which is real. What was real to Pilate was the fact that he had a political mess on his hands. Pontius Pilate was a governor in the Roman Empire. Pilate answered to Caesar, the emperor of that vast and mighty empire. Now Pontius Pilate was in charge of the unhappiest of the Roman provinces, the province of Judea. He oversaw the law and order of the Jewish people. And that was no easy task. The Jewish people in the days of Pilate were divided into a number of political and religious parties—none of whom saw eye to eye. If there was one thing that these Jewish parties held in common it was the fact that none of them liked being under the thumb of Roman rule. There had been upheaval and rebellions in the past, some of which Pilate had not handled very well in the eyes of his Roman superiors. Pilate’s job was on the line. His livelihood rested upon his ability to maintain order among the Jews.

So you can begin to understand Pilate’s dismay when the Jews led a man named Jesus from Nazareth into his courtroom early on a Friday morning. It didn’t take Pilate long to figure out that this public disturbance surrounding Jesus had to do with the religious beliefs of the Jews. And Pilate didn’t have time to get mixed up in a Jewish religious debate. The differing Jewish parties were always debating about their religion. Pilate despised their religious quibbling. All it did was fuel the unrest in his province. Pilate wanted nothing to do with this trial. Just prior to our lesson he tells the Jews, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.”

But the Jews raised the stakes in this trial when they objected to Pilate’s command because the Jews wanted to see Jesus executed and they didn’t have the power to sentence anyone to death. And so the Jewish accusers charged Jesus with sedition: threatening the Roman rule by claiming to be a king and challenging the authority of the emperor. An accusation calling for the death penalty was something Pilate had to take seriously. He couldn’t afford any more unrest in his province than already existed. That’s where our lesson this evening picks up this account. If this Jesus really was a king, Pilate would have had to deal with it. But a short interrogation proved that there was no thought of political rebellion in the mind of Jesus. Therefore, he was of no concern to the affairs of the Roman Empire, and Pilate felt free to dismiss Jesus—just another blathering prophet in a land filled with religious blatherers.

What had Jesus said that caused Pilate to form such a conclusion? “My kingdom is not of this world. My kingdom is from another place. I came into this world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” It was clear to Pilate that Jesus was not leading a political rebellion. However it should have been abundantly clear to Pilate that there was more to Jesus than meets the eye. But Pilate didn’t have the time to side with anyone’s version of truth. There were so many truly important matters he had to attend to, and this man Jesus was a just a distraction to him. Truth? Who has time for that? You can sense the disgust in his

voice when Pilate says, “What is truth?” as he walks back outside to address the Jews, completely indifferent to the message just proclaimed to him by the King of Truth.

We are rightly disgusted by the apathy which Pilate demonstrated toward Jesus. But the painful truth is that we can sometimes be just as apathetic toward Jesus and his word of truth. Our lives, after all, are filled with all kinds of important matters. It’s a lot of work to make a living and provide for our families, to go to school, to keep up with the chores around the house. We can feel like we’re just treading water in this life. Doesn’t Satan often tempt us to believe that there is no way we can make time for God’s Word during our busy days? Doesn’t he tempt us to believe that even if we did make time for God’s Word, it wouldn’t do any good? The bills still keep piling up. Our loved ones still get sick. We begin to doubt God’s promises. We begin to think that God’s truth doesn’t fit into our lives. We turn out to be the ones who mutter in disgust, “What is truth?”

Because of our apathy and rebellion, because of the way we walk away from our God, we deserve to have our God leave us to struggle through the difficulties of this life on our own. And so much worse than that. We deserve the Lord’s eternal wrath. Father, forgive us when we abandon your truths!

And he does. He does forgive us.

In spite of the fact that we at times have abandoned God’s truth, our Lord Jesus continues to bring saving truth into our lives. “For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” Jesus brings saving truth into our lives because he is the fulfillment of the truth of God’s Word. He fulfilled every prophecy which the Old Testament spoke about him. Jesus was born just as the Scriptures said—a descendant of David, in the town of Bethlehem. Jesus did the things which the Scriptures said he would do—healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, showing zeal for his Father’s house by driving the money-changers out of the temple. All those things are the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Furthermore, Jesus testified to the truth of God’s Word by perfectly obeying the truth of God’s law. Jesus was never indifferent about the things which God commands. He never went against God’s Word. Jesus lived the perfect life for us because we do not live perfectly. And Jesus fulfilled the truth of God’s Word by dying the death which the Scriptures said he would die. That’s why Jesus, the innocent Son of God, stood there before Pontius Pilate early on that Good Friday morning. He willfully gave himself over to the authorities to be executed, just as the Scriptures said—“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world so that his kingdom would come.

By the grace of God, Christ’s kingdom has come to us. Just as Jesus said to Pilate, this is not a kingdom that is of this world. It is not a visible kingdom with geographic borders. Christ’s kingdom comes when he rules in the hearts of people. Jesus has taken reign in our hearts because he has placed his Word of truth in our hearts. By the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, we believe everything that the Scriptures say. We believe that Jesus has saved us from sin and eternal death by his innocent sufferings and death. Now we are on the side of truth.

Because Jesus has brought us into this truth, we are able to live our lives on the side of God’s truth. We see that remaining closely connected to God’s Word everyday isn’t a waste of valuable time in our busy lives. God’s Word brings meaning and hope and peace to our lives. When everything else is spinning out of control, the saving Word of truth in Christ Jesus is the one thing that remains constant.

“What is truth?” Pontius Pilate may have asked the question but he really didn’t care about the answer. He turned his back on the King of Truth and the words that would have saved his soul, and he got on with the more important work of the day. But we know that the truth is found in Jesus—in God’s Word. It brings forgiveness and healing and power to our lives. Brothers and sisters, keep Jesus and his saving word of truth near to your hearts. He has blessed us with his truth in the past, and he will continue to do so in the future. Lord, sanctify us by the truth; your Word is truth. Amen.

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Midweek Lent #4

Seminarian Shane Krause

Trinity Lutheran Church
1268 Pleasant Valley Road
West Bend, Wisconsin