

John 19:12-16a We Have No King but Caesar! Midweek Lenten Service 5, March 16, 2016

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Savior and King. Amen.

Our lesson is from John 19:12-16.

These are Your Words heavenly Father to assure us that Jesus is our true King. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Christian Citizens,

In this year of politics, we've heard too often the term flip-flopping. One candidate accuses the opponent of flip-flopping, a sudden change of opinions. In today's lesson, we see that kind of change in the Jews. Pontius Pilate must have thought, "I can't believe what I'm hearing them say" when the Jews said,

We have no king but Caesar!

The Jews used those words to force Pilate to execute Jesus. The dispute between the Jews and Pilate began early on Good Friday when they tried to persuade Pilate to give his quick approval of Jesus' death sentence. But Pilate did his own questioning. It didn't take him long to see that Jesus was innocent. Pilate also wanted the Jews to know that he held the power in Jerusalem with his Roman law and troops to back it up. The Jewish leaders weren't going to force his decision!

So Pilate and the Jews squared off with Jesus' life hanging in the balance. Pilate knew little about the Jewish religion. As long as it didn't interfere with Roman order and taxes, he didn't care. At heart, he was a cynic: he doubted whether anyone could be certain of any truth. On the other hand, the chief priests knew God's truth. They knew right from wrong and innocence from guilt.

Jesus was a Jew. The Jews would have normally sided with Him and against the hated Romans. But the Jews hated Jesus more. So, they invented charges against Him that were so ridiculous that even Pilate, the unbeliever, saw the truth and wanted justice for this Jewish man. Pilate tried to set Jesus free through a Passover amnesty program. But the people chose Barabbas. Then, Pilate had Jesus flogged and mocked hoping to gain the crowd's sympathy. But, that did not change their argument. Jesus had claimed to be a king, they said. If Pilate set Him free, he would be siding with the enemy. Crucifixion was the Roman way to stop rebellious kings. When Pilate asked, "*Shall I crucify your king?*" the chief priests answered, "*We have no king but Caesar.*" (v.15) With those words, Pilate sent Jesus to His death.

Pilate could have stopped this wicked plan of Jesus' murder if he had been willing to risk his rule and perhaps his own life to save an innocent man. In the end, Pilate didn't risk anything to save Him. He just took care of himself. If we had stood in his place, we'd like to think that we would have stood up against the Jewish mob and their threats to tattle about him to Caesar. But, we have the same sinful nature that wants to put self first before anyone else's needs. Are we willing to sacrifice our time, money, or convenience to show Christian love?

Acts 23 describes how the Apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and falsely accused. The Roman commander was ready to have Paul whipped and beaten him like a criminal. But, when he found out Paul was a Roman citizen, he flip-flopped. He later sent Paul to the governor with a letter saying how he had saved Paul's life knowing that Paul was a Roman citizen. He lied! He wasn't willing to risk his life for Paul. He just wanted a promotion!

By nature, we have that same lack of love for others, just like the Jews and Pilate. But, Jesus was different. He was willing not only to risk His life, but give His life to save not innocent people but the guilty. What irony that Jesus endured this arguing between His enemies knowing that they we're going to change the outcome. He was going to the cross, submitting to God's perfect will. There was no flip-flopping with Jesus. Through Christ's perfect obedience to God and His innocent death, He made the full payment for sin. His blood washed away our guilt for the times we have flip-flopped in sin. God has forgiven and freed us.

Second, the words, "We have no king but Caesar" are the opposite of what God wants for us. The chief priests hated Caesar and all that he represented. So the phrase "we have no king but Caesar" was that last thing they wanted to say. But it was sadly true. They thought that God was their king despite calling for Jesus' death. But, they had replaced the true God with a king of their own making. They were later destroyed by Rome for their rebellion. They had chosen a way without God that led to their death.

But we have Jesus. He was the true King as the Son of God, with His human descent from David just as God had promised. He came not to be an earthly king in Jerusalem or Rome, but to rule in people's hearts. All people are spiritually ruled by someone, a "Caesar" who directs their thoughts and lives. Jesus gave His life on a cross to be our king. He has given us His Word to learn so that He might rule us with blessing. But from the time we were born, we wanted another king. We could call this king "Caesar" or selfish pleasure or false honor, or any other name. But it's our sinful desires. To this day, the old king still knocks at the door of our Christian hearts trying to get back his rule from Christ. None of us is strong enough to keep him out and keep our allegiance to Christ. The devil is constantly looking for ways us to pull us away from God. How many people do we know who were active Christians but now have drifted away? Paul warned, *"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12)*

But, the God who turned into good the evil flip-flopping of Pilate and the Jewish leaders is the same God who has given us faith. He has promised to keep us strong, firm, and steadfast to the end. When we find our old nature shouting for "Caesar" instead of Christ, we remember that Christ is patiently calling: "Turn to Me for help! You have My Word to build you up. I have given you Baptism and Holy Communion to keep your faith strong. I have given you pastors and teachers to comfort you with My grace. I have given you other members to encourage you. Stay strong in Me!"

Normally, when we talk about someone flip-flopping, it is not a good thing. But for us who have become Christians it is! We were born with the devil as the king in our hearts and he was leading us away from God to our judgment. But, Christ has rescued us from his evil kingdom and brought us into His glorious kingdom. By the Holy Spirit's power we have flip-flopped from unbelief to faith in Christ. We have gone from darkness to spiritual light in Christ. There could be no greater change for the better! Our loving and powerful Savior rules our hearts. As we trust in Him we will not be flip-flopping any more, but will stand firm with Jesus as our Savior and say: "We have no King but Jesus!" We repeat: "We have no King but Jesus!" Amen.