

LENT: A PILGRIMAGE WITH JESUS TO THE CROSS

Today is the 4th Sunday of Lent. Today we enter into Pilate's encounter with Jesus. As the Roman Governor of Palestine, Pilate administered the power of the Roman Empire. He had thousands of troops under his authority, and could speak life and death to almost anyone. But like so many in positions of great power, Pilate knew the harsh reality of politics, rivalry and compromise. Though the average person was afraid of him, Pilate, too, knew fear – the fear of missing the truth about life. Pilate could easily identify with King Solomon, who in his search for meaning found only emptiness and vanity apart from God.

And now, into his meaningless existence, enters Jesus, the source of truth and the holder of real authority. As the Governor meets the Son of God and King of kings, he is brought face-to-face with all he is looking for, and challenged in his soul to follow the King or remain loyal to Caesar's empty court.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT: John 18:33-40 – Jesus encounters Pilate, the Roman Governor.

²⁸ *Jesus' trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor. His accusers didn't go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, "What is your charge against this man?"*

³⁰ *"We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" they retorted.*

³¹ *"Then take him away and judge him by your own law," Pilate told them.*

"Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone," the Jewish leaders replied. ³² (This fulfilled Jesus' prediction about the way he would die.)

³³ *Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him.*

³⁴ *Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?"*

³⁵ *"Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?"*

³⁶ *Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world."*

³⁷ *Pilate said, "So you are a king?"*

Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true."

³⁸ *"What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime. ³⁹ But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this 'King of the Jews'?"*

⁴⁰ *But they shouted back, "No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a revolutionary.)*

¹⁹ *Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. ² The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a purple robe on him. ³ "Hail! King of the Jews!" they mocked, as they slapped him across the face.*

⁴ *Pilate went outside again and said to the people, "I am going to bring him out to you now, but understand clearly that I find him not guilty." ⁵ Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said, "Look, here is the man!"*

⁶ *When they saw him, the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"*

"Take him yourselves and crucify him," Pilate said. "I find him not guilty."

⁷ *The Jewish leaders replied, "By our law he ought to die because he called himself the Son of God."*

⁸ *When Pilate heard this, he was more frightened than ever. ⁹ He took Jesus back into the headquarters again and asked him, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer. ¹⁰ "Why don't you talk to me?" Pilate demanded. "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?"*

¹¹ *Then Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above. So the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin."*

¹² *Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, "If you release this man, you are no 'friend of Caesar.' Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar."*

¹³ *When they said this, Pilate brought Jesus out to them again. Then Pilate sat down on the judgment seat on the platform that is called the Stone Pavement (in Hebrew, Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was now about noon on the day of preparation for the Passover. And Pilate said to the people! "Look, here is your king!"*

¹⁵ *"Away with him," they yelled. "Away with him! Crucify him!"*

"What? Crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the leading priests shouted back.

¹⁶ Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified.

Meditation by Megan Mulder – Vancouver.

The heart of Pilate must have been a deep, deep wound when he asked, *"What is truth?"*

Jesus loved Pilate profoundly and compassionately, and his silence is, I think, a result of that. When you love someone, and when you know their heart and the anguish set so secretly within their being that they have never put it to words, what is there to say? Compassion, from Latin, means together suffering, and sometimes suffering can knock the wind out of you.

The scene is set in my mind as if I were there: it is a small, second-story room. Pilate stands at the window looking out over the city. Jesus is quiet in the corner, himself very weary. *What is truth?* Pilate asks.

I wish so terribly that Pilate had looked—just for a moment!—away from the world and into the face of God. They could have been two men burdened with grief—but burdened together. Though suffering is painful, it need not be lonely.

Questions inviting response:

- What is the anguish of your heart today? Are you staring at it through life's window, while Jesus is left in the corner? Will you invite him to journey with you in your anguish, even allowing the Savior to take your anguish from you?
- Who are the anguished in your life? Ask the Father to reveal Jesus, the Truth, through you.

Prayer

Jesus, you are the way, and the truth, and the life.

I humbly invite you again into my confusion and my brokenness, and ask you to breathe your truth into my weary bones and empty existence. Thank you that in you I find truth, meaning, joy and life itself. Amen.