

Christ the King Sunday, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 18: 33 – 37

Looking at the Gospel lesson this Sunday, my eyes were drawn not so much to Christ the King, as to Pilate, the governor. The events of this Gospel lesson take place on Good Friday of course, and Jesus is standing before Pilate, shortly before the crucifixion. Who was Pontius Pilate anyway, what do we know about him; and for us as disciples of Jesus—are there lessons we can learn from this guy?

The Lord be with you. And let us pray:
Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, forgive us the sins we commit each day—what we say, what we do, what we leave undone. Save us from selfish indifference, and awaken us to a new kind of life, lived always and only for you. In Christ's name we pray, AMEN.

So who was Pontius Pilate, anyway. Put yourself in his toga for a minute, what was life like for this guy, anyhow? Was he all that different from us? And on that otherwise sleepy Friday morning in Jerusalem, all those years ago, what was he thinking? And why.

Start with a little history. Pontius Pilate was a bureaucrat, he was upper middle management. He had followed a time honored career path within the Roman Empire, and had made it nearly all the way to the top. He was, the procurator, of the province of Judea. The procurator—in the Roman system, there were two kinds of governors, ok. There were first of all proconsuls, and proconsuls were sent by the Roman Senate to places that were fat rich happy and safe. You didn't necessarily need talent to be named a proconsul,

you just needed connections, that's all. A *procurator* on the other hand was a governor sent to a province that had issues, so to speak, and that quite frankly needed professional leadership. A procurator answered directly to the Emperor, which no doubt helped with your ulcer, and a procurator stayed in office as long as the Emperor deemed it expedient. Pilate was the latter, a procurator, governing Judea, one of the most famously obnoxious provinces in the Empire, and he did so for 10 solid years. Bottom line? The man was no fool. Pilate had talent, he was good at what he did—now what he did was not always pleasant. The sources indicate that Pilate was not afraid of Saddam Hussein style brutality if it, umm, “kept the peace,” but you must remember Pilate wasn't paid to be nice; just effective; and you see that in his treatment of Jesus. According to the Gospel of John, Pilate had a strong personal interest in “the truth,” truth was like his hobby. Being effective was his job. Guilty or innocent, Jesus had to die, because otherwise there may be a riot out there and the Emperor, doesn't like riots.

So that was Pilate. Talented. Effective. His hobby was the truth but his job was real life. Not what does that say about us.

#1. The truth. There are many many Christians in this world who are in the habit of church, and that's nice. That's special. There are many of us in the habit, of belonging to a congregation, and that's great!—but here's the thing:

What's the connection between your Sunday morning faith, and your Monday morning life. What's the connection? Is there one? Here in this house, we dare to talk about The Truth. We talk about truth and in fact give it a name—Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, but that's here. Out there we get paid to be effective. Is there a connection? Or is The Truth, just a weekend hobby.

We know what the answer's supposed to be. But we also know the kind of price we'd have to pay? Like Pilate that way—he knew Jesus was innocent, but he also knew the price he would have to pay personally for letting Jesus go, isn't that us? In your work, in your family, at school, with friends, the right thing to do is not always a mystery. The right action, the godly response, it's not always hard to discover. But it is always hard to do, and it would cost us something personally, and so we bail. Easier to keep faith confined to a Sunday morning ghetto, easier to make faith a hobby.

No. Follow Christ the King, not Pilate the governor. Speak your faith today, live your faith tomorrow. It's not a hobby, it is your life—or it's nothing at all.

#2. Same song second verse really. Nothing says more about Pontius Pilate than Matthew chapter 27 verse 24, where he simply washes his hands of the whole sorry situation. "Not my problem!" he says. "Somebody else's mess,

let them deal with it!” Isn’t that a temptation for us too? People are hungry, children are poor, young people need a sense of direction in life—not my problem, my kids are all right. Watch the evening news, shake your head at the pain in this world, oh well. I’m doing ok. Dread diseases throughout the globe, people overseas dying of preventable diseases, what do we do here, we literally wash our hands, every chance we get, we wash our hands and we don’t worry much about sick people out there. So long as we’re doing fine ourselves.

Washing your hands of it all is tempting, and it works if you want to follow Pilate. It will not work for those who follow Jesus Christ.

Indifference is a damnable sin. Let your hands get dirty and don’t worry if they stay that way, as long as your heart is clean, and in the Lord’s care and keeping.

#3. A large point that will have to be small today: Life is not always fair. Life is not always fair, Pilate was a decent man who did some good in life, honest. But all *we* remember him for, is the biggest mistake he ever made. Doesn’t seem fair. He did many good things in life but all we know about him—he ordered Jesus to be crucified.

Newsflash folks—life is not fair. Ok? It’s not. What can I say we, just deal with it as it is. Only remember the Good News, only remember that God is

not fair either. God is not fair either, after all, Jesus died, and you get heaven, right? Tell me that one's fair, Jesus died and you get heaven, the Good News is that God loves us and God always will. God has a place prepared and ready for you in heaven, and will walk with you every day here on earth, that's not fair people! You don't deserve it! Deal with it. God loves you, that's just the way it is.

Finally, #4? It all comes down to Jesus. It all comes down to Jesus, whatever you can say about Pilate and his times. Whatever you can say about us, and ours. It's about Jesus. Is He a King? Then where is His Kingdom? Did He die on a cross?—well that one is easy, yes He did, Pilate ordered it and his soldiers took hammer and nails and got the job done. So yes, Jesus died. Did He then rise again? Will He be back? Is He King in my life, is He King in yours, will He be King tomorrow for us in the world out there, and will He one day be revealed as King of all creation?

Stay tuned. The Truth is, it all comes down to Jesus. It always does. And King Jesus, always comes through. May He do so for you, this day and forever, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.