

*Texts: Psalm 145:10-13; John 18:28-40*

*Subject: Jesus and Pilate*

*Theme: The Truth Sets Us Free*

*Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 27, 2022; Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We've found ourselves in the middle of the story of Good Friday, yet we've a few weeks to go until that day. This morning we hear the story of Jesus being condemned. This passage carries a history of anti-semitism, when it is interpreted as the Jews killing Jesus. It's important to draw a distinction here between the people and their leaders. We see this playing out in the news all the time, and especially in the reports of the Russian people who are protesting the war waged by Putin in Ukraine. While the wealthy elites remain loyal to their leader, many, especially young people, are standing up and speaking truth to power, at the risk of police brutality, detainment, and even their own lives. Nearly 15,000 people have been arrested there to date. State-owned media tells a different story about the war than the one heard from independent journalists, who have been silenced in recent weeks. What's the truth?

That can be hard to find. Just look at the news. If you can find actual news, that is. In our media, we hear of crimes committed, and without trials or evidence presented, we often make our own judgements about what happened and about what justice looks like. Before we even know the details, we might be shouting about the particularities of a case online or out marching the streets. We pick sides.

Truth can be hard to identify, since each of us experiences the world based on our own perceptions, opinions, and biases. We see things differently, and what is true to me, may not be true to you. When we describe the ways we see ourselves and the

world around us, we claim we are “speaking *our* truth.” Objective truth means that something is true regardless of our perception of it. Earth’s gravity exists. You might experience it differently in different places, but it’s true no matter what. There are even objective truths that some will disagree on at times. Some choose to believe the Earth is flat, for some reason. I’ve never personally circumnavigated the globe, but I’m going to go out on a limb and say the earth is spherical. If you want to disagree, you’re free to do so. Good luck.

We can’t *know* everything, about everything for ourselves. Some level of trust is required. What is true for us is based on teaching, if we trust the ones delivering the information. If I tell you something, what you think of me might play a role in how you take that information. What we know to be true is centered in our experiences and observations. Our privileges and biases shape not only how we live in the world, but how we honor the stories of others who have had different experiences. What is true for us can be based on what was true for our families of origin and those closest to us. When we trust, we can learn. Without it, we’ve already made up our minds.

Our eyes and ears are bombarded with so much information these days, I wonder if we automatically tune some of it out just because we can no longer contain the massive amount that comes our way. We have to make up our minds quickly and move on, just to survive. We can’t take time to deliberate on what’s worthy and true. Jesus is handed over just before the sabbath. There’s some urgency to get this matter settled before the people sit down to the Passover meal, before the holiday begins, so the leaders bring Jesus from Annas to Caiaphas, and then to Pilate.

Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate, the Roman provincial governor. Pilate doesn't live in Jerusalem, but he's there for the Passover - not to celebrate it, mind you, he's not Jewish, but to show that the ruling powers are in control. He's usually in another town on the coast. He's used to working from home. So maybe he's resentful that he has to be there in the first place. He doesn't seem to know what to do with Jesus or want to jump into the fray in this situation. With that many Jewish pilgrims coming into the city to celebrate the high holiday, the authorities are on guard against any insurrection. They want to keep order and protect their power. That's what the powerful tend to do. So he questions Jesus. Is he claiming some power? Is he a king? What's going on here? Some scholars believe that Pilate was intrigued with Jesus. Some traditions, including the Coptic church and Orthodox church in Ethiopia, hold that Pilate became a Christian. Who can be trusted here?

Last week we heard Peter's denial - he wouldn't even admit that he knew Jesus. Karoline Lewis writes that "Jesus is on trial before Pilate, but Peter's verdict also hangs in the balance." We might imagine Peter hiding away waiting to see what's going to happen next, to find out if Jesus really can be trusted, to see if the truth will come out. And aren't we so often Peter in the story?

We want to know that the ones we've set our hopes upon are trustworthy. We want to know that our faith and actions are not in vain, that we haven't wasted our time. We have been so disappointed in elected officials who failed to live up to their promises, have been devastated when relationships fail to last as long as we think they should, or have been shocked by the moral failure of religious leaders and other authorities whose

moral breakdowns have injured others or even cost lives. How can anything be true? We're waiting to find out.

Jesus knows where he's from. He knows where he's been, and what he's been doing, so why doesn't he just respond to Pilate's questions in a more straightforward way? Jesus chooses not to argue. He doesn't explain away the accusations. If was you or I, we might be demanding an attorney, asserting our innocence, or calling in witnesses. The "Lamb goes uncomplaining forth." Is he a rebel? A king? We don't even hear the crime he's been arrested for.

Jesus says, "My kingdom is not from this world." We might hear this pointing us elsewhere - where is Jesus' kingdom from? - John has been telling us about the one who sent him this whole time. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth...The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:14,17) The word that was with God and was God, came to us to inaugurate a new reign, a new way of being, that doesn't align with the world of power and privilege and control and oppression that we are all too aware of. The kingdom of Pilate was about keeping order. Jesus was about loving beyond the boundaries. The Pharisees' kingdom was about strictly following the law, even at the expense of those who were left out. Rabbi Jesus taught a way of grace and inclusion, feeding, healing, and blessing all who were in need. Jesus doesn't care to defend himself, maybe because he knows the outcome, maybe because he knows Pilate won't hear it, or maybe because the prophecy is about to be fulfilled. Jesus knows his hour has come, and that God will be glorified.

Jesus responds that “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” Isn’t that what we’re all for? Were we born to make money? To build or conquer? To hoard wealth and bully others into doing what we want? Or were we all made for something else? What truth will our lives speak?

Rabbi Amy Robertson shares a song from the Jewish morning liturgy that goes, “Truth, Truth, you are first and you are last. Without you we have no king, we have no redeemer, we have no savior.” *Emet*, truth in Hebrew, is another name for God. Jesus isn’t claiming to speak some truth. Jesus doesn’t correct Pilate and respond to his accusations by telling the truth. But Jesus claims that everyone who *belongs* to the truth listens to his voice. Jesus is *the* truth.

Can we handle the truth?

As the psalmist sings, “the works of God speak of the glory of the Kingdom - they give thanks,” and proclaim the truth - God is good - the Lord is faithful and true. The Kingdom might not be from this world, but in Jesus - it’s already here. To see the kingdom is not to be pointed away from our earthly existence, but to testify to the grace God has shown us in Jesus, not because we earned it or achieved it, but because God loved the world so much, and chose to free us from our sin and ourselves in this way.

Jesus was Jewish all the way. He goes with all the people at the time of Passover, to remember the story of God’s liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The powerful truth of the faith that was passed down through the generations - that God rescues, and provides a way in the wilderness. Now we see Jesus, the true passover lamb, as God arrives to free the people once more, in a new way.

Pilate would have been content to let the Jewish leaders handle this matter, but they insist that Jesus must be put to death, and allow Pilate to set the bandit, Barabbas free. Let the bandits go - we know what to do with them. But Pilate no longer has any power over Jesus. Our Lord lays his own life down. He was born for this. God, who is holy and good, raised him up and he has freed us from sin and death. Jesus is the one to whom we all belong. Jesus is *the* truth.