

“What is truth?” That question couldn’t be more damning than it is today, could it? But there was that time when Pontius Pilate popped the question to Jesus. Tonight we’re going to talk about what that means and what it has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

JOHN 18:33-19:42 (*selections*)

Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”³⁸ Pilate said to him, **“What is truth?”**

^{19:1} Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.³ They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands.⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.”⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!”⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”⁷ The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.”⁸ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?”¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”¹³ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”¹⁵ They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus,¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.”²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

When Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “**What is truth?**” he was taunting him. The Lord had just said he had come to give witness to the truth, and Pilate, a pagan with Greek philosophical roots, supposed there was no absolute truth, just as Western relativism today presumes.

But if Pontius Pilate had followed Christ over the past three years, he would’ve known the answer to his question.

From the beginning to the very end of his earthly ministry, Jesus told the truth. He told the centurion that his servant would live, and he did. He told Martha and Mary that their brother, Lazarus, would rise from the dead, and he did. He told the disciples to go into a village and they would find a donkey for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, and they did.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus visited people in their hearts with his truth—he revealed their deepest needs, and then He ministered to those needs.

But there’s a catch—there’s always a catch: For example, if your doctor told you that you have appendicitis and that he must operate on you immediately, you would ask, when and where? For you know that if he didn’t operate, you would die. But you could so no, and your doctor could yell at you until he was blue in the face. But if you didn’t let him operate, what he told you wouldn’t make a bit of difference in your life.

Indeed, the people who accepted Jesus’ truth with faith were healed; they were made whole. But there were those who rejected Jesus’ truth and remained in darkness. Consider the story of the adulteress from earlier in his ministry:

JOHN 8:3-11

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more."

The woman and the religious authorities all heard the truth on that day. She was called out for being an adulteress. And the scribes and Pharisees were called out for being unfit to be her judge. The woman repented for her sin but the religious authorities did not.

Some people can't hear their truth. We like to hear about everyone else's truth, but don't you dare call me out for mine! Pride is our death. For if we cannot hear our truth when Jesus reveals it, we cannot hear his absolution for our sins either.

Jesus' last words on the Cross were, "**It is finished.**" And then he "**bowled His head and gave up His spirit.**" He was dead. His life with humanity was finished. He had received the cup of suffering from his Father, and he had drunk deeply.

But on the Cross, on that first Good Friday, Jesus brought his truth to bear on the spirit of humanity and he absorbed in his flesh the curse of our sins. Our heartache and shame, our bitterness and rage were made powerless over us. "**It is finished,**" indeed.

I reflect on the truth in my own life. There are many contradictions: There is sin, but too, there is holiness. There's uncertainty, but too, there's clarity. There's darkness, but too, there's light. There's fear, but too, there's confidence. Confidence in the Cross; confidence in the Empty Tomb; confidence in Baptism; confidence in the Lord's Supper; confidence in Jesus' promise: "**It is finished.**"

What is the “**truth**” Jesus wants to bring forward in your heart? We are a people who can do and say wonderful and beautiful and encouraging things to one another. But we can also dispense pain by the bucketful. Who do you need to get right with? What is your “**truth**”?

When Jesus said to the woman who was about to be stoned, “**I do not condemn you,**” she must’ve felt like she had wings and could fly! She knew that she was SO dead, but then Jesus announced her freedom. You can almost hear her sigh of relief.

The truth gives us wings,
wings to soar over hell below into heaven above,
where we meet God in glory.

Friends in Christ, this evening let us meditate on the truth the Lord has revealed about our own lives. Let us repent and be absolved. “**It is finished.**”

Tonight, let us allow the truth of Jesus’ love to fill our hearts to overflowing that it may drown the self-condemnation we still hold on to.

And too let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.