

**What is Truth?: The Road that Led to Jerusalem  
John 18:28-40**

**Ecumenical Midday Lenten Service  
Christ United Methodist Church, Piscataway, NJ  
March 19, 2008**

*Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)*

*Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'*

*After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit. (NRSV)*

I pity Pontius Pilate. He was placed between the Rock and a hard place. He was clueless about what to do with this young adult rebel standing in front of him, with Caiaphas, the religious riff-raff, and the angry mob all breathing down his neck.

It was a game being played – a game of Truth or Consequences.

Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin declared the verdict in their minds. The plain evidence, eyewitness testimonies, and their own experiences of this revolutionary Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee was that he was guilty of crimes against the religious system of Moses and Abraham, leading people astray to actually think that a Samaritan woman can actually belong to the precious covenant made with Israel, or that a blind man since birth can actually be given sight, or worse, that you can render works of compassion on the holy Sabbath day.

In their minds, surely such a man is neither a king in the line of David, nor is he a prophet of God.

So, they bring the matter to Pilate to adjudicate. Their desire? To delete Jesus from the face of the earth, no matter how hard the truth may be. It would be easier to remove the truth that is preaching and serving right in front of you than to deal with the Truth personally.

If there was ever a time that we all want truth and truth-telling, it is now. After the deception that Baby Boomers faced with the quick war that turned into the Vietnam quagmire, the Nixon cover-up, coupled with the assassinations of two heroes in Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., Baby Boomers saw truth with different lenses, becoming suspicious of government and institutionalized systems, such as the Church.

Now, 30 years later, we see our country and our society longing for truth and truth-telling again. This November is believed to be a historic election in our lifetime. No matter what your party affiliation is or who your preferred candidate is or will be, there's something to be said about the electoral attraction of someone perceived to be a no-holds-barred, no-BS, tell-the-truth-

as-it-is candidate John McCain, or what has been called the refreshing vision of truth in Barack Obama against Washington's insider's game.

We want truth, plain and simple. We want to believe again. You come to Church on your lunch break because you want to hear whether there is truth, plain and simple. Is all this stuff about Jesus really true? We come to Church every Sunday, waking up early in the morning, because somehow, somewhere, in the rhythms and patterns of our life and living, we want to know deep-down, we want to be reassured, that all of this is true.

That, yes, in the midst of a broken family, a troubled marriage, deep loneliness, financial distress, Jesus is still true.

We want to know and to keep believing that even when there is war in the world and in Iraq, thousands of children dying every minute all around the world, an ailing spouse, sibling, or friend who prays but doesn't seem to get better – that somehow, there is still a loving God who is true and who cares. We want to know

that, deep down in our bones, to penetrate into the deep recesses of our souls.

Can it possibly be all true – that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus welcomed all sinners and still does? That Jesus lived among us, and died for us that we would be free from ourselves, from sin, from death, and rise to newness of life with Him?

Can it really be true that God's love for us in Jesus Christ is such that nothing and no one can separate us from that divine love that will never and shall never let us go?

Can it really be true that this God in Jesus Christ calls us into service, to participate in God's kingdom work of showing what righteousness, justice and peace looks like when a word of forgiveness is uttered to another, when bread from one beggar is given to a fellow beggar to eat? Can it be true?

Can it really be true that no matter what I face, no matter what you are facing, no matter whether we feel that the world is falling apart around us and all of our work feels like it doesn't

matter, that in the midst of it all, is it true that Jesus is still King, whether the world believes it to be true or not?

The Isenheim Altarpiece created by the 16<sup>th</sup> century German Renaissance painter, Matthias Grünewald, depicts the Crucifixion in a grotesque scene of Jesus Christ hanging on the cross, blood dripping into a chalice at the foot of the cross, with John, Mary and Mary Magdalene in anguish. All the figures are smaller in size than the crucified Christ. The point of the altarpiece, the truth of this depiction is to be found in the pointing figure of John the Baptist who stands at the right panel, with an open Bible in his left hand and his right finger pointing to the gruesome, dying King of the Jews. John the Baptist's message, "He must increase, I must decrease."

It is on this basis that we know for certain that all things, my life, your life, all that happens around us, directs our gaze upon that which can only be believed. We believe in the truth that Jesus is and forever will be King, no matter what. For the consequences of that truth is that He shall increase, and we will decrease, but in

His increasing, He raises us up with Him until heaven and earth are united to Him, and His rule and reign over all powers and principalities will be brought together in Him. What is truth? Pilate asks. What is truth? we ask. His name is Jesus, the King of the Jews.