

Lenten Service March 13, 2013

WHAT IS TRUTH?

INTRODUCTION: Read before the lesson

This evening we see how Pontius Pilate had to deal with the most searching question of all "What is Truth?" Although desperate to escape it, he could not. Although he tried hard to easily dismiss the question it would not be dismissed. Jesus would not be easily dismissed. Jesus kept returning to him and in his person, the very embodiment of Truth itself, Jesus continued to have the question asked in different ways "What is Truth?" The answer stood by the question. Pilate, then by his hesitancy in crucifying the Christ was answering his once dismissed question. Jesus was not guilty. Jesus was innocent. Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. Could he be from above? Behold the Truth. His first question leads to his last "What shall I do with this truth?. And such question leads to our last question a week from tonight: "What shall I do with Jesus"?

READING: *The Praetorium (Harmony of the Gospels) from Altar Book LSB page 494*

SERMON

THE SEARCHING QUESTIONS OF LENT

For the last couple of Wednesdays we've spent some time analyzing all the questions asked in the Garden of Gethsemane and then, the Courtyard of the High Priest . Here, in the courtyard of the High Priest first with Annas and then Caiaphas, Our Lord's trial began. It was unjust. The charges brought forth by witnesses did not agree. The court was breaking the law by holding "Night Court". Injustice abounded.

But despite the unfaithfulness of our Lord's enemies in following the law our Lord would remain faithful in fulfilling it to the very end. Despite the evil motives behind the question of Caiaphas, such questions prove to be "searching questions of lent" and Jesus would honour the question and answer in sincerity and in truth.

He always did. Therefore, when the High Priest invoked an oath, a kind which required all Israelites to respond, our Lord in perfect fulfilment of the law responded. Caiaphas asked:

"I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God."

⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, “You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”

Jesus had just declared that he is the Messiah. He is the Son of God, meaning that he is Divine. He is the one who is coming in the clouds to judge both the living and the dead. Wow! Weighty questions with answers to ponder through the ages! Behold the Christ!

If only the High Priest had rent his garments in repentance rather in his own self righteous judgment. Some other evil would have risen up to take his place to be certain. But consider the witness!

Caiaphas had had his chance. Now the Son of God stood before Pilate to reveal his character, his deity and his purpose.

Pilate beckoned to Jesus to come to him inside the Praetorium:

“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?”

As much as Pilate wanted to avoid things spiritual he would not be left alone.

Jesus gives him a synopsis of His mission as the dialogue continued.

“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.”

The light of Christ was penetrating into Pilate’s world. Here was a man claiming to be born with purpose. A nuanced meaning came with his birth. He was “begotten”. Most people, then as now, have no claims to be born with a purpose but Jesus did. Could there be a touching of the heart? Christ brings a blessing that we are called to a purpose in him...Christ’s testimony to Pilate is powerful to him and to us. There is purpose in Christ. There is meaning. There is a mission! But Pilate cannot take it.

³⁸ Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

From the context of it all we know that He said just like that “What is Truth?” And he walked away. Jesus was no threat to his worldly realms. He turned his back on the Christ and turned himself to the Jews saying.

“I find no guilt in him.

Pilate had no time for Jesus. But still Pilate’s finding Jesus not guilty would be a theme throughout the day. Jesus is innocent. He is not worthy of death. Soon the pressure would be put on Pilate to deal with Jesus and all his claims about Truth as daylight shone in greater degrees physically and spiritually.

By some administrative wonder Pilate thought he could get rid of the problem by sending Jesus to Herod but it would be short-lived reprieve.

So Pilate was stuck once again with Jesus and all his claims concerning the Truth. He went to the crowds again. And I hope that in all this you see how you are stuck with the claims also and how it might impact your life.

You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him

Truth is coming from Pilate's lips. Behold the innocent one. Who is innocent in this world? Aren't you intrigued?

Nevertheless Pilate had him scourged. The blood thirsty crowd would be satisfied in seeing him suffer. Pilate could be released also for the need to pursue justice and the question of truth. But despite his desire to evade the question it was not to be. The crowds cried "Crucify! Crucify Him" and once again Pilate was dealing with religious issues concerning Truth which he didn't want to deal with.

We have a law, they said, and according to that law he ought to die because He claimed to be the Son of God.

O the weighty questions again! Pilate drew Jesus back inside the palace for a second private hearing. "Where have you come from?" Jesus would not reply. But you can be sure that Pilate's conscience did. Pilate was beholding "the Truth" just as we in turn must. He was witnessing the "precious Lamb of God". And it infuriated him so he had to engage the one claiming truth. Do you not know that I have the authority to release you or to crucify you. You would have no authority whatever over me if it had not been given you from above.

Matthew's Gospel records the scene where Pilate's wife, we know her from history as Claudius Procula, came to her husband and warned him.

Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.

There comes a time in every one's life when the Christ must be dealt with. When Truth must be confronted. Ultimate questions demand an answer. They cannot be ignored forever. God did not let Pontius Pilate just walk away from it as he had done so, so many times in the past.

God will not let us walk away from the important question "What is Truth?" either.

Although we are all Christians here, we know that there is an element of Pilate's sin possessing us. There is an element of Truth we do not want to explore. Which aspect is it for you? The certainty of your mortality? An evaluation of how you spend your short time on earth? The task of evangelizing to your friends? The call to explore the faith in confirmation class and

make a commitment to the Church? Let's pause for a moment. Which element of the Truth which Jesus calls us to, are you needing to explore at this time in your life?

We've paused for a minute which is longer than Pilate probably dared to spare.

We know what Pilate did. He turned his back on Jesus and immediately went to the crowds. He heard from his wife, the conduit for the Spirit to think on ultimate Truth again. But Pilate still only sought practical ways of getting rid of the Jesus problem and the calls to his conscience. His haste and eagerness to quickly dismiss it all led to the beginning of a riot.

Pilate no longer wished to be involved. He no longer wanted to wrestle with Truth. It wasn't going to be the abstract intellectual discussion anymore was it. Important things like "Who is God?" "Where is meaning to be found?" and "What is Truth?" compels an answer

He turns to the mob for them to supply him with the answer his heart desires. He asks: "What shall I do with your king?" Confronted with Truth and now acquainted with Truth we leave this evening anticipating next week's "when the rubber meets the road" kind of question. Knowing truth what shall we do with the embodiment of Truth. Pilate asked himself as much as he asked the crowd.

"What shall I do with your king?" And guess what? We are also in the crowd. Indeed. What shall we do?

Amen.