

Mid-Week Lenten Worship February 25, 2015

“Pontius Pilate” A Sermon in the First Person

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IT’S MY FAULT, RIGHT?? I don’t like what you say. You know, the accusation that you make every week about me. “Crucified under Pontius Pilate”. You don’t mention the kiss by Judas or the betrayal by Peter or the weakness of John Mark. Just me. Pontius Pilate. Others had great responsibility in this as well, the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin and the Sadducees and the Scribes and the Elders of the people all had their power and persuasion, they all had their agenda and they were stirring up the crowds, so why pick on me? You have read about the crowds and how they were wild that day. They would not be quieted. Oh, you know a little bit about mob mentality, I bet you have seen some of all this, so can’t you cut me a little slack? Why take my name and make it infamous, mentioned next to those who have done some of the worst things in the history of mankind?

I guess I can’t change that whole thing now, can I? Over and over again my name will find its way on your lips. So when you think about me what do you think?

So many think of me as one who has no backbone. I’m just weak. I knew what was the right thing to do but I couldn’t do it. They brought Jesus to me early in the morning on that Friday and they demanded that I bring justice to them. But I asked them, “Why, what has this man done?” And they wouldn’t answer. “If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” (John 18:30) Oh, I knew it was out of envy that they wanted him gone. I’m no idiot. Over and over again I came to the whole crowd and said, “I find no basis for any charges against him.” But they were beyond listening.

They had a plan and it demanded his blood. And they insisted that I give it to them. I was the governor and supposedly had the power, but in reality they showed more power than me.

The crowd was smart. They played the trump card to get what they wanted. They knew that I had made a few political blunders along the way and that Rome was watching to see if I could maintain some type of peace in that area of their world. They started to say to me, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar." (John 19:12) That got my attention. So, it was either his future or mine. If I let him go, Rome would put their thumb on me. You see, doing the right thing was not so easy.

"Crucified under Pontius Pilate". My weakness is found in every syllable!! But it was more than that. And I don't need to tell you. Indifference. That is what I am known for. I got a private audience with this Jesus. I had to find out why they held such hatred for this man. He seemed innocent enough but the cries of vengeance made me wonder. So when he came privately in my palace, I asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Then he assured me that his kingdom was not of this world. But then my indifference between right and wrong, good and evil became apparent. Jesus had his classic line during this conversation, ..."For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone of the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37) And then I gave my classic line, "What is truth?" Who cares? Indifference. Apathy. I didn't care if truth won, I cared for me and my position and holding on to my power. If an individual had to fall so I could hold on to my position, so be it!!

Yes, "Crucified under Pontius Pilate" Weakness, Indifference. Ya, it's true. If only I had listened to my wife. There, maybe that is something that you can take with

you today. Listen to your wife!! My wife, Procula, sent me this note, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man.” She had had dreams that day and they bothered her immensely. But instead of strength, instead of integrity, I took this basin of water and washed my hands and said, “I am innocent of this man’s blood, it is your responsibility.” It is wonderful to evade responsibility, to make such bold assertions – if only they worked.

But they don’t and it didn’t. You speak the truth every Sunday – “Crucified under Pontius Pilate”. Under my watch, my rule in weakness, my indifference, my running from my responsibility came the death of the one they called the Son of God.

But please realize I tried. It was the custom to show some kindness to the Jewish people every Passover by releasing a prisoner of their choosing. Oh, there were times when we put folks into prison under questionable reasons. So as an act of appeasement a pardon was given, a little bone was thrown to them. Maybe it showed the Jews that we did have a heart. So I offered to free Barabbas or Jesus. Barabbas had committed crimes against these people. They wouldn’t want him freed. My, was I was wrong! They demanded we release Barabbas and crucify Jesus.

So it was my fault, right? How about your responsibility? Do you have any of these faults that put this man to death? Maybe you have others, or ones even greater. Maybe your name should be listed right next to mine. Crucified under Pontius Pilate and by Jim or Kathy or Stephen or Larry. And you and you and you!

But something still intrigues me in all this. One of the times when I called Him in privately to discuss all this and said, “Don’t you know that I have the power to either free you or crucify you?”, he told me, “You would have no power over me if it were not given

to you from above.” I saw all the evil and the plot that came from others, I knew of my weakness and indifference and evasion of responsibility, I even think that you had something to do with this. But I never thought that this plan and the approval of it came from above, from God!! God had something to do with this. This was more than evil having its victory? This was more than man doing what was wrong? God, the giver of love, the bringer of wisdom and righteousness had his hand in this? Why would God want His own son to die? Love? Forgiveness? Mercy? Wow!! That changes things.

Crucified, under the plan of God. I like those words better. Amen!!

*(The thought and many of the words used in this sermon are taken from the book, “Voices of the Passion”, by O.P. Kretzmann)*