



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church  
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March 18, 2009  
Midweek Lenten Worship  
John 18:33-38  
Pastor Randy Ott

**Forgive Us When We Abandon Your Truths!**

The Romans prided themselves on their ability as orators, their ability to speak, to persuade people, and to move people. They devoted a lot of time and energy to it. Of all the great orators that were produced by Rome, it's a little bit ironic that maybe the best known three words of any Roman are the ones that I read to you this evening, "What is truth?" Cicero's orations, do you know any of them? Can you quote any of them for me tonight? Some other great orators, their writings have come and they've gone, and what stands is "What is truth." I think the Romans would be a bit disappointed.

It's kind of interesting to consider "truth" and the question "What is truth." I think we live in an age where truth is treated kind of like the stuff I did when I was a kid with silly putty. You get the comic pages. Roll the silly putty over it and then stretch it to make it look like something different than what it really was. We have a tendency to want to take the truth and stretch it to fit what we want it to look like and not simply let the truth be the truth. And I think we could sit here and probably come up with a lot of examples in our society where the truth has been stretched like silly putty. It's good that we know that. It's good that we can see that so we avoid some of those errors, but as we consider Pilate approaching truth as a convenience or an inconvenience, we have to look at our own lives and see how often we have done the same thing so that we too can cry out "Father, forgive us for the times we have abandoned your truth." We have abandoned it.

If you were at the preview of Financial Peace University this last Sunday, there was a quote that the speaker had that I thought was pretty fascinating. He asked us "What is 98% truth?" What's the answer? What's 98% truth? It's a lie, isn't it? How many times in our lives have you and I patted ourselves on the back because our percentage of truth was a little higher than someone else's around us, forgetting that any percentage of truth that doesn't reach 100% is a lie. So as we look at Pilate, let's look at ourselves and figure out for ourselves where you and I are tempted to abandon these truths to make our lives a little more convenient or a little easier.

Some have said that Pilate just had other things to do and just didn't want to spend time with Jesus and the truth. I think the exact opposite is the case. Pilate was the governor over this backwater portion of the Roman Empire, Judea and the surrounding areas. It wasn't all that important, but it was a challenge to rule because it was probably one of

the most unsatisfied areas. They didn't want to be under Roman rule. We are familiar with that from what we read in the New Testament. They wanted the Romans gone because they wanted their pagan gods gone. They wanted to worship in the temple the way they wanted. And they wanted Messiah to be able to come, a Messiah by this time as we know thought would get rid of these Romans. So they did a lot of things to make it tough for those that were ruling over them.

Something they always had going on was religious squabbles. The Herodians were back and forth against the Pharisees. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees would get into it. One rabbi would argue with another rabbi. If Pilate wanted to he could have spent his entire life just settling some of these squabbles, but that didn't really interest him. What interested him was ruling the people so that he didn't get into hot water with Caesar.

Shortly before this last Passover of Jesus' life, Pilate had gotten into trouble with Caesar. He had made his share of political mistakes in trying to handle some of these squabbles of the Jews. They had sent off some envoys to Caesar. Caesar was not happy with Pilate. The last thing Pilate wanted when the city of Jerusalem was filled with all these pilgrims, when there were all these people there and they were having their high festival in their religious life which he could care less about and couldn't understand because he was captive to a pagan god, he didn't want that religious fervor to spill over into patriotic fervor that would lead to a rebellion and a revolt. So I think Pilate is going to set aside his day planner for that day and he's going to deal with these issues when they got him out of bed early that morning. He is going to deal with it because he knows his neck is on the chopping block so to speak. Especially when the charge comes that he claims to be a king because now we are in Caesar's territory here, right?

So he interviews Jesus. He talks to him and it becomes quite clear as he talks to Jesus that he's not claiming to be a king that is any threat to Caesar whatsoever. Jesus says "My kingdom is not of this world." A guy who has a kingdom that is not of this world, are you really worried about him if you're the leader? You think he's nuts, right? "My kingdom is not of this world. For this reason I was born. I came to this world so that everyone who listens to the truth listens to me." "So, you're claiming to be a king who rules over all the people who listen to truth. That's nice, but that's no threat to me." Truth for Pilate is a convenience that he can use for his political ends, or it's an inconvenience that he has to brush away so he can achieve his political ends. In this case, the truth, that Jesus was innocent, became clear to him, but it became an inconvenience.

If he sets Jesus free, it could just be the spark to be thrown on the gasoline of the Jews' resentment against the Romans. So he says, "I find no basis for a charge against him." But then he beats him, bloodies him, and crucifies him. Truth, inconvenience, what is it? "I don't need truth right now. I need this political problem dealt with." So he sets aside the truth and he kills an innocent man because it will make his life easier.

At the very basics of our understanding of all of this, it really shouldn't surprise us. Pilate is not operating from the same perspective as you and I, right? He is a slave to Satan. He is a slave to his false gods. He's a slave to himself. He's a slave to whatever you might think he is a slave to but in reality, you and I know there are only two options. You are a slave to Satan, or you are a slave to righteousness, a slave of God. He's no slave of God. Does it surprise us that as a slave of Satan truth is a convenience or an inconvenience, something to use as a tool but not something that directs you or not something that you're interested in learning more about? It shouldn't surprise us.

But here's what should surprise us. You and I who believe Jesus is our Savior; we've been changed, right? The old is gone. The new has come. You and I, as our very nature of being Christians, are concerned about truth, about God's truth. We are concerned about "whatever you do, do it to the glory of God." We are concerned about doing it at all times and in all places and in all ways to say "Thank you Jesus for taking away our sins." But do you and I ever review truth as an inconvenience that we need to kind of just brush out of the way because it doesn't fit in with what makes us comfortable right now?

You and I know better, but do we screw up at times. We screw up at times and then our conscience begins to attack us and then we can maybe get back into these games we can play about percentages of truth. Whenever you and I set aside the absolute truth of God and follow our own desires, when we do what we know to be sin, when we excuse someone else's sin that's close to us just so we won't have to address it and admonish them, when we find a friend who is saying "did I do the right thing" and we assure them "that person had it coming. They were a jerk. What you said that hurt them, that was okay," we've just made a funny face with silly putty with the truth, right? We can find someone else that has stretched the truth farther, but it doesn't change the fact that we abandon it and we know better.

What did we just say a little bit ago? "We all like sheep have gone astray." This is just another example of it. We tend to segment our lives into "this is the God part" and "here's the other stuff." And in this other stuff, we can do whatever we want with truth at times. It's all sin. It all damns us to hell. We might as well be there behind Pilate shouting "Let him have it," because that's what we are doing.

That's why it's probably real important for us to not just focus on Pilate and what he says, but to focus on what Jesus says. What Jesus says here is absolutely amazing. Here he is, face to face, breathing the same air as this servant of Satan. A guy he knows that is going to hand him over to be killed. And what does he do? He tries to reach out to this guy and talk to him about truth. He tries to engage him in a conversation so that he will inquire about truth and a kingdom of truth. What could that possibly mean? Here this guy is as close as possible as you could be to the greatest event in history, God himself coming to earth and living and dying in our place, God himself is reaching out to him, and he doesn't want anything to do with it.

But look at Jesus. He doesn't stop. Here is his grace. He continues to reach out to those all around him in the garden as he was betrayed, as they are nailing the nails into his hands and feet. And here as this servant of Satan wants nothing to do with truth, he tries to confront him with truth. This is God's grace. This is the grace that led Jesus to the cross so that you and I are changed so that the old has gone, the new has come.

We are now no longer servants of Satan. We are servants of Christ. We are not our own. We were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God in your life with the truth. Live according to the truth. Speak the truth in love. Build each other up with the truth. The truth always centers in the Gospel.

Find time to listen to the truth. That's what Jesus was imploring Pilate to do and that's what he has implored us to do. As we saw last Sunday, he is incredibly zealous for you and me. He wants to live in us through his Word and Sacrament. He wants us to hear that truth and rejoice in that truth.

We have the opportunity to come and sit at the feet of the cross and hear of our Savior's love for us twice a week during the season of Lent. What an incredible blessing that is, to hear of this incredible love that our God has for us. We who have deserted him, we who have denied his truth, we who have lived in a way that killed him; he still comes to us and says "I love you. I want you to know me better. I want you to know that you are forgiven so that you can go forward and live for me more, better, and more joyfully."

That's grace. That's what our Savior has for us.