

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. (NIV)

Abandon. The very word is able to send a shiver down our spine. We find a malnourished dog or cat that someone decided to just abandon and we look at that poor animal & think: "What an awful thing, who would do something like that?" A husband or wife wait for their spouse to come home and they wait and they wait and they wait. Then they find out a hard reality. Their spouse is not coming back. The person they love leaves them for good and walks away forever. They abandon them and we say: "Oh, how terrible!" A child is taken to a doorstep of a home or an orphanage and is dropped off as the parents quickly drive away. They abandon their own child. Or even worse a baby, still alive, is dumped into a trash can like a piece of garbage. They abandon their little baby. Who of us would not gasp: "How horrible?"

Dear friends: as bad as all these things are, tonight we witness a tragedy even greater. To have standing right in front of you the Lord of life, to hear speaking to you the Word made flesh, to look into the eyes of Him who is the Truth, then to just walk away, to abandon Him, is the travesty of all travesties. Tonight, we watch a man we know by the name of Pontius Pilate become guilty of this. Tonight, we face the hard reality that we have been guilty of this. I pray each of us listen to God's Word before us and with repentant hearts turn to God our Father, and earnestly cry: **Forgive Us When We Abandon Your Truths! Forgive Us When We Abandon Your Truths!**

Try for a few moments to put yourself into the shoes of this governor Pilate on that Friday morning long ago. Pontius Pilate had one job above all others - to keep the peace in his province. And the Jews were not always the happiest members of the Roman empire. History records some confrontations between Pilate & the Jews and how Pilate was warned by His superiors not to allow things to get out of hand. The empire wanted order and any governor who could not guarantee it would soon be looking for another job.

So Pilate had almost the exact opposite philosophy of the man we know by the name of Martin Luther who once said: "Peace if possible, but truth at any cost." But for Pilate we see it was peace at any rate, even if it meant compromising or abandoning truth, or at least the idea of truth. Pilate had not the time or the inclination to get mixed up in Jewish religious disagreements. Besides there were always so many debates among the Jews. The Pharisees disagreed with the Sadducees; the Herodians disagreed with the Essenes; this rabbi disagreed with that rabbi. Perhaps this helps us understand this governor's skepticism a bit. This is also why we find Pilate focusing in on only one of

the accusations that was brought against this Jesus of Nazareth. And that was that He claimed to be a king, the King of the Jews.

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Pilate could not have anyone threaten the peace, so he questions Jesus and quickly finds out that Jesus is no threat at all. Jesus asks Pilate if he really wants to know if Jesus is a king or if it what he had heard about him from others. He wants Pilate to think about it for himself who He is and whether He speaks the truth. But Pilate snaps back saying that he is not a Jew and it was Jesus' chief priests and Jesus' people that brought Jesus in. And then Pilate asks Jesus what he has done.

But again it doesn't take Pontius Pilate very long to come to the conclusion that Jesus has not done anything worthy of death. It doesn't take Pilate long to realize that Jesus was telling the truth that He had no interest in a earthly kingdom. The truth was Pilate could not find any basis for a charge against Jesus. Pilate could see that Jesus was different. He was amazed at how Jesus stood there without saying a word as the accusations and lies were heaped upon him. He even was warned by his wife who had a dream saying not to do anything to this innocent man. Pilate also hears Jesus tell him: *"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*

Right there Jesus was reaching out to Pilate. He wanted Pilate to know that He is the truth and the way and the life. Jesus wanted Pilate to know that He came into this world to save sinners. He wanted Pilate to listen to Him. Right here Truth was looking Pilate eye to eye, pleading its case, offering forgiveness and eternal life. Right here Jesus was saying if you want to be on the side of truth you need to listen to me.

But Pilate abandons the Truth. This truth didn't fit into his life, so Pilate turns his back on Jesus. He doesn't listen to God's truths. He turns away saying those infamous words: *"What is truth?"* He walks away from the one who came to save him. Pilate then tries to compromise the truth that Jesus was innocent by having this innocent man ridiculed, mocked, and tortured, by having Jesus suffer under him, and then by offering to his enemies a murderer in Jesus' place. When that doesn't work Pilate completely abandons Jesus who had done nothing wrong by washing his hands and allowing the Son of God to be crucified. We are left saying: *"What an awful thing! How terrible and horrible! How could Pilate abandon someone right in front of Him speaking such love and truth!"*

While we shake our heads in disgust this evening at Pilate, perhaps we need to look into our own hearts as well. You may be saying: *"Wait a second here Pastor, we are Christians. We love Jesus and believe in Him as our Savior. We are on the side of truth. In fact, we are WELS Lutherans who believe the Bible is God's inerrant Word and strive to hold to all God's Word teaches."* Yet, what happens when we don't like what God's truth has to say to us? How many times have we failed to listen to the truth because it doesn't fit into lives? When Jesus says *"anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy oh me,"* that truth just doesn't always fit into my plans. We love the truth until Jesus speaks to us about how we are spending our money and reminds us that we have sinfully set our hearts more on earthly things than on things

above. We can agree the Bible is truth, but then we want, at times, to compromise its truth when God says sex is only for marriage, and alcohol is to be used only in moderation, and to lie, even a white lie, or curse or to listen to or spread even a little gossip about anyone is sin. It is a hard truth to swallow when I hear God say that I am no better than Pilate or the thief or the adulterer or the murderer and even harder to hear God point out that when it comes to my sins I can't do a single thing about them. My pride doesn't like that.

So we turn our backs on the Truth. We don't listen to Jesus. We walk away and sin. We abandon Jesus every time we do not listen to God's Word for every Word belongs to Jesus. Every Word points us to Jesus who came to save us. When we abandon God's truths, we abandon the Sinless One who came to redeem us. How awful is that! How horrible and terrible! I pray it is enough to lead us to admit this truth: "*I am a poor miserable sinner.*" I pray it is enough to make us cry: "*Father forgive us when we abandon your truths.*"

In Lent, we see and hear God's answer, don't we? We hear our Savior, as His blood drips from the cross, praying: "***Father, Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.***" We see the complete darkness cover the earth and hear Jesus' cry of agony from Calvary's cross and then recognize that God abandoned Jesus there with our sins instead of abandoning us. There was the worst kind of abandonment because there on the cross God the Father forsook His innocent Son. He did so to punish Jesus for all the times we have compromised the truth. He did so to make Jesus suffer for all the times we have abandoned God's truths. Jesus was abandoned and suffered until every last sin was paid for and until His last breath was taken.

Now the word abandon is no longer able to send a chill down our spines because the Holy One did not see decay, neither will we be abandoned to our graves. Now we are confident that nothing in all creation is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Now we are assured of forgiveness in the words given and poured out for you. Now our victorious Savior still intercedes with the Father on our behalf saying: "***Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.***" Now we want to listen to Him who is our Truth and our Way and our Life. Now we are thankful God has put us on His side, the side of truth, where we can't hear enough God's sweet answer to our prayer this evening: "*Take heart, my children, your sins are forgiven.*" Thank you Jesus. Amen.

