**Pilate: What is truth? 15/3/23**

Good Friday was riddled with competing truths, as well as some big lies.

The truth for the chief priests and the ruling council was that Jesus was upsetting the status quo. They had seen countless so-called Messiah’s rise up to lead rebellions, anger the Roman authorities and leave behind a mess for them to clean up. Jesus was drawing big crowds. There were over 5000 people in one crowd and that was out in the countryside away from Jerusalem. If they left Jesus alone, what sort of crowds would he draw in Jerusalem and how would the Roman authorities respond?

The truth was that it wasn't easy for the ruling council to maintain their citizen's religious freedoms and local customs with the constant pressure from Rome. This was especially the case with their current Roman governor Pilate who could be very ruthless. He had little regard for their laws and customs. Not long ago he had killed some Galileans and defiled their bodies by mixing their blood with their sacrifices.

The truth is that chief priests and ruling council had nothing on Jesus to convict him of. This led them to resort to another truth. This truth is actually a lie that people tell themselves to justify whatever they want to do. You may have heard this supposed truth. Maybe you have used it in your own life - the **end justifies the means.** They all agreed that Jesus had to be eliminated but knowing they had nothing against him to justify their goal of putting Jesus to death, they desperately searched for false witnesses. Unfortunately for them, the truth was that they couldn’t even find reliable false witnesses against Jesus that would justify putting him to death.

Finally, the chief priests and ruling council found a truth upon which they could convict Jesus. The high priest asks him directly, *“I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”  Jesus responds, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*  *(Matt 26:63, 64 NIV).* Jesus is telling them the most important truth they will ever hear in their life. A truth that will open to them a new relationship with God, forgiveness, and life in all its fullness now and into eternity. If only they believed this truth.

The unfortunate truth is that the chief priests and ruling council don’t believe Jesus. The only alternative to not believing Jesus is to believe he is blaspheming. Blasphemy carries the penalty of death. Conveniently this aligns with their other truth, that he is a troublemaker who needs to be eliminated. A last they have the truth they need to convict Jesus. A supposed truth that turns out to be a lie that ultimately condemns them.

The next truth to deal with is that the ruling council do not have the authority to condemn anyone to death, this is in the power of the Roman authorities. They had to get into bed with the local governor to get what they want. They make plans for how to approach Pilate and manipulate him into convicting Jesus.

Jesus is brought before Pilate who examines him. Pilate is a politician, and his role carries its own truths. He is the local face of Roman authority. Becoming a governor is no small thing, and this region of the empire has had its fair share of trouble. At his very moment, he has another Jesus in his prison. This Jesus Barabbas was part of a recent uprising during which he had committed murder. He certainly doesn’t want another uprising on his hands. Other governors have lost their positions for not keeping control over their regions and he certainly doesn’t want to go the same way.

Pilate wants to know if Jesus is another rebel seeking to rise up and become king. One of his first questions is, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus gives a strange answer, “You have said so” (Matt 27:11, NIV). Soon enough Pilate realises that whomever Jesus is, he hasn’t done anything to deserve death, but there are some other truths Pilate has to contend with.

The truth is that the chief priests and ruling council have a very strong influence over the citizens of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside. It is in Pilate’s best interests to keep them as happy as possible. His relationship with Herod the local Tetrarch has not been good, and the truth is that this incident may be an opportunity to change that. He looks for a compromise and offers the people the choice between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Barabbas. Which one should he release? His plan doesn’t work because the leaders whip up the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas. No matter how hard he tries to have Jesus released the local leaders have control of the crowd. Pilate played his hand, and the truth is he has lost.

Pilate publicly confesses the truth that Jesus is not deserving of crucifixion and death as he symbolically washes his hands of Jesus’ blood and passes off the responsibility for Jesus' death onto the crowd. Of course, the truth is that no amount of washing makes Pilate innocent. At least the crowd admit the truth as they answer, “His blood is on us and on our children.” (Matt 27:25).

Pilate understands how to use power and uses the situation to symbolically show his power even when he sees the situation get out of hand. He continually refers to Jesus as “king of the Jews” or “the one you call the king of the Jews” Matt 27:9,12, NIV), to make the point that even of Jesus is a king, Pilate is the one who has ultimate control over his life. Even when he is crucified Pilate orders ironically that the words “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” (Matt 27:37, NIV), be written on the cross in Aramaic, Greek and Latin the three major languages spoken in the region.

The truth is that Pilate does not have ultimate control. Jesus says as much when he tells Pilate,“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11, NIV).  The real irony is that the truth is that Jesus of Nazareth is the king of the Jews, of all nations and of the universe.

When Jesus dies the truth is revealed from the mouths of those guarding him on the cross, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matt 27:54, NIV). With all the competing truths on Good Friday and all the competing truths in our own lives, there is one truth that matters. The truth that matters is the truth that is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God and everyone on the side of that life-saving and life-giving truth listens to him.

**Amen.**