

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

On Sunday, we looked at the rabble of sinners, friend and foe alike, that surrounded Jesus, for whom Jesus suffered and died. Tonight I want to consider Jesus before Pilate, and Jesus lifted up on His cross.

Pontius Pilate's name is better known than most men throughout history; he is named — his role in salvation history is remembered — in the Apostles' Creed. Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Pilate's name lives in infamy because Jesus had foretold it: "*the chief priests and scribes ... will ... deliver [the Son of Man] over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified*" (Matt. 20:18-19).

There are two perspectives in view in Jesus' passion: from below and from above. From below, the injustice is apparent to us, even as it was to Pilate. Jesus was an innocent man being railroaded to His execution.

Jesus was said to have been doing evil, but twice Pilate as judge answered his accusers, "*I find no guilt in him.*" Even the charge that Jesus was making Himself out to be a king that could rival Caesar seemed absurd. The people had called Jesus "*the King of Israel*" (John 12:13) as He entered Jerusalem, but that was a bit comical as He rode in on a donkey. And though Jesus admitted to Pilate that He was a king, His "*kingdom is not of this world,*" Jesus also told him. No, this man was no threat to overthrow Caesar — He did not deserve to die according to Roman law.

Still Jesus was punished; Pilate had Him beaten brutally, so that Jesus became as the prophets described Him — as one with "*no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*" Surely the people hid their faces from Jesus as Pilate brought His bloodied and bruised flesh out and beckoned the people to "*Behold the man.*" But nothing would divert the mob from their thirst for innocent blood. "*Crucify him!*"

"*Behold Your King!*" Pilate was fixed on Jesus' kingship, but as He stood there before the mob, He was "*a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people*" (Ps. 22:6). "*We have no king but Caesar.*" "*Away with him, away with him, crucify him!*"

The Jews had failed to convince Pilate that Jesus deserved death according to Roman law. They turned to their own law, the law of blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), and according to THAT law, they said, Jesus deserved death because He "*made himself the Son of God.*" The injustice continued on two counts: first, that Jesus had blasphemed — Jesus was indeed the Son of God; and second, that Jesus should

be crucified by Gentiles. Stoning was the punishment for blasphemy, not crucifixion.

Pilate finally gave in to the insistent mob. He sent Jesus to the gallows to be hung on a cross till death. It was done according to God's will, that justice might be done, that mankind might be justified by Jesus' blood. This is the view from above.

Therefore, Jesus went without a fight, as He did in the garden — *“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”* (Matt. 26:53) — as He did as He was being shuffled to and fro from Annas to Caiaphas to Pilate to Herod and back to Pilate, as He had showed as He was being reviled. He did not revile in return (1 Pet. 2:23). Jesus did not resist, for it was God's will that He be lifted up unto death, that we might be saved through Him. Here was the Lamb silently led to the slaughter, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; here was the Shepherd laying down His life for His sheep (John 10:15).

*“Behold the man,”* Pilate had proclaimed. He didn't know how right he was. Jesus was the Son of Man, come down from the Father's side, embodying all of humanity in His Divine body. And so, He loved His own who were in the world: His mother, to be sure; the beloved disciple, too; but us poor sinners He loved to the end, until He had finished it, until He had accomplished God's justice, until He had appeased God's wrath, until He had atoned for the world's sin. *“It is finished!”*

Yes, Jesus endured injustice from Pilate, and the Jews, and the mob, and from us, that He might become the justice of God for us. Jesus and His cross are the locus of God's justice — our iniquities were laid on Him; they are the locus of our salvation — with His wounds we are healed; they are the locus of our faith — we preach Christ crucified, that by believing in Him we are accounted righteous.

This doesn't make sense to our minds apart from the Spirit's work in us. God's thoughts are not our thoughts; injustice toward Jesus from below is justice toward us from above. The message of the cross is foolishness to us naturally. God's ways are not our ways; He punished the innocent that the guilty might be set free. But that's why we call it grace, and that's why on this day we rejoice that Jesus has finished it for us. That's why we call this Friday good.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.