

**John 18:37,38 “You are a king then?”**  
**Pilate asked. Jesus answered, “I am, as you say, a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”**  
<sup>38</sup> **“What is truth?”**

An 18<sup>th</sup> Century German philosopher (Arthur Schopenhauer) had this to say about truth. He said, “*All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.*” Now I can’t say that I agree with much of his over-all philosophy, but as we listen to the focus of our message this afternoon, I think he nailed it, so to speak, even as the Truth was nailed to a cross.

You see, earlier on Maundy Thursday evening, Jesus had said to the disciples. “***I am the way, the truth, and the life.***” (Jn 14:6). Listening carefully, we note he didn’t say, “I am truthful.” Of course, he is. The sinless Son of God cannot lie. Nor did he only say, “I’ll tell you the truth.” The prophets and apostles did that. They were, after all, only mouthpieces, proclaiming truths that were given to them. No, Jesus is so much more. He is truth itself. And as we consider the Truth this afternoon, standing before Pilate, please...

Late Thursday evening, the Jewish court, called the Sanhedrin, had already passed the death sentence for Jesus. As a subject nation, though, they could not carry out the death penalty. Their Roman conquerors had wisely reserved that power for themselves. So early Friday morning, it was off with their prisoner to Pilate, the Roman governor.

But what accusation could they bring that would stick? The religious charge of

blasphemy that they had manufactured for their own court wouldn’t even get a hearing in Pilate’s venue. New charges were in order, and their sin-darkened and hell-poisoned hearts rose to the challenge. “***We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king,***” they charged (Lk 23:2).

A charge like this Pilate *had* to investigate (as the Jews well knew). No official representative of Rome could ignore such a threat to the emperor of Rome. When Pilate accordingly asked Jesus, “***Are you a king, then?***” he received this answer: “***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.***” In response, all Pilate could muster was the jaded question “***What is truth?***” With his weary question Pilate seemed to imply that there was no absolute truth, especially in religious matters.

And perhaps we could not have expected any other reaction from him. The Roman culture in which he was steeped had abandoned faith in religion and morality. It even laughed at its own gods and paid more attention to things like dreams and astrology. If anything, Pilate was a pagan skeptic, a practical agnostic. For him the answer was simple. There is no truth.

And oh how the unbelieving world still asks the same weary question: “***What is truth?***” Certainly, it takes different forms today, but the problem is still the same. Absolute truth in matters of morality and religion simply doesn’t exist, or so they insist. What seems true for one generation may change for the next. Just listen to their so-called wise questions, like: Was the world created in six days by an almighty God, or did it all come into being with a big bang? Did God really make man as the crown of his creation, or did man claw his way to the top of the evolutionary ladder? Are human beings merely advanced animals

who can satisfy their sexual desires any which way, or does God have specific roles for sex and marriage? Is all mankind sinful and in need of salvation, or is there no absolute moral standard to which we are held accountable? Is salvation something people can work out for themselves, or is it a gift of God?

Sadly, the world answers: "Truth is relative and so, then, is right and wrong. And so, what is right or wrong for one person might not be for the other." Or to put it another way, "What is truth?"

Thanks be to God, we know the right answer to Pilate's question. By God's grace, many of us from little on have known the truths of salvation found only in Christ Jesus. Perhaps for us the question isn't "What is truth?" but "What is the truth worth?" Again this holy season it's been time to examine our response to that important question. What does my hearing of the truth, my reading of the truth, my studying of the truth, my sharing of the truth show about its importance to me?

Jesus answered Pilate that day, "***I came into the world, to testify to the truth.***" Truth was standing before Pilate in the person of the Son of God. Truth shows us what we were—sinful and condemned. Truth shows us what we have become—forgiven and righteous. There's no need for speculating questions like Pilate's. Jesus Christ *is* God's living word of salvation. He *is* truth in the flesh! If this were mathematics, we'd say, "Jesus = Truth" or "Jesus = Salvation." He is truth in action. He stepped from eternity into time, clothed divinity in humanity, slept in a cradle, suffered on a cross, shed his blood as the God-man to make himself the truth of our salvation. If we want to know how to be saved, there is only one answer—Christ. If we want to tell others how to be saved, there is only one truth to speak—Christ. We can live without many of the "truths" the world

puts forward, but we cannot be saved without...Christ.

Pilate had the opportunity to learn the truth that first Good Friday. He had the truth standing before him in person, but he wouldn't listen. Today Jesus the Truth stands before you and me again in his Word. "***From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,***" he reminds us through his apostle Paul (2 Ti 3:15). "***Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ,***" he also reminds us through the same apostle (Ro 10:17). "***If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,***" he who *is* truth himself reminds us (Jn 8:31,32). Would we know the glorious truth of how sinners become saints, how enemies of God become his precious children, how slaves of sin become servants of the Savior, how people hell-bent become heaven-bound? Then we need to listen to Jesus. We need to drink in his Word. We need to "***diligently study the Scriptures . . . that testify about [Jesus],***" the Truth (Jn 5:39).

Children have a way of asking questions, often times questions that make us uncomfortable to answer, or we don't know how to answer, or...truth be told, we don't know the answer. You know: Why is that man homeless? Why do the kids next door have so many more toys than we do? Why do some adults cry when they're happy? They also listen to the answers and whatever you tell them is the absolute truth. God help us listen with believing hearts to Jesus' answer to that all-important question "What is truth?" God help us to treasure Jesus' answer, "I am the Truth," because it shows his wondrous love for sinners like you and me. Amen.