

Midweek Lent – St. John 18:33-38
February 25, 2026 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches
March 4, 2026 | King of Grace Lutheran Church, Waukon

Witnesses of Christ's Passion: Pontius Pilate

In Nomine Iesu

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St. John 18:33-38

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You over to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But My kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" / After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in Him." (ESV)

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession and, though innocent, were mocked, crowned with thorns, and sentenced to die for our sakes, we humbly ask You, enable us in true faith to appropriate to ourselves Your holy merit, to endure enmity and reproach with a meek and gracious spirit, to confess Your holy name before all people, and to find both here and hereafter rest and peace in You, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 109)

In Christ Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, dear fellow redeemed:

As the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate had authority to administer justice on behalf of the Roman Caesar, or king. He typically did not live in Jerusalem, but he went there at the time of the Passover when many more people would be in the city than usual. Now early on Friday morning, the Jewish leaders brought him a so-called criminal, someone named "Jesus of Nazareth." They would have preferred to execute Jesus on their own, but this was something the Roman officials did not allow. Any cases involving the death penalty had to come before the governor.

Pilate asked them a reasonable opening question: "*What accusation do you bring against this man?*" (Joh. 18:29). That was a difficult question because Jesus had done nothing deserving of death. The religious leaders initially refused to give Pilate a straight answer. But then they made their case: "*We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king*" (Luk. 23:2).

The first part of their accusation was false. Jesus did not mislead the nation in any way, as if He were trying to overthrow the Roman authorities. That very week He had underscored their responsibility toward both God and government officials when He said, "*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*" (Luk. 20:25). The second part of their accusation was true. Jesus was the Christ, the King over all. But they wanted Pilate to think that

Jesus was setting Himself up as an earthly king who would cause problems for both Governor Pilate and Caesar. Better, they said, to have Him eliminated.

Pilate must have heard something about Jesus before this. He was the governor in Judea the entire time that Jesus carried out His three-year public ministry. Jesus traveled all over the region teaching and performing miracles, even raising some people from the dead. King Herod was certainly aware of His activities, and *"he sought to see him"* (Luk. 9:9). Pilate must have known something about His work, too, though he made no reference to it when he questioned Jesus.

He cut right to the chase: *"Are You the King of the Jews?"* Pilate's main interest was to find out if Jesus was someone who was a threat to Roman rule and the peace of the region. He hardly regarded Jesus as a king. Jesus hardly looked like one. What Pilate did not realize is that he was in the presence of the King of the universe from whom all earthly authority came. It was something like *"Undercover Boss,"* when a store manager has no idea he is talking to the one who has all the power.

Jesus said, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But My kingdom is not from the world."* So yes, He was a King, but not the kind that the Jews accused Him of being. Pilate agreed. *"For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up"* (Mar. 15:10).

Then Jesus stated His purpose for coming into the world, that He came *"to bear witness to the truth."* He said, *"Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice."* Pilate must have felt uncomfortable at these words of Jesus. The whole conversation had not gone as Pilate expected. We imagine how Jesus looked at him, like He could see right through him (because He could). Pilate may have thought to himself: *"Does this Jesus think that I, Pilate, would want to listen to Him, to care what He had to say?"* Pilate brushed it all aside: *"What is truth?"* he said.

But there is one thing about Jesus that Pilate was convinced was true. He was convinced that Jesus was innocent of any crime that would justify the death penalty. So he told the Jews, *"I find no guilt in Him."* He had seen and heard enough to know that Jesus was not what the Jews made Him out to be. What Pilate did not know was that he was an unwitting part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. Jesus had to die, and it had to be on a tree, a cross, cursed for the whole world's sins (Gal. 3:13).

God had used a decree of Caesar Augustus to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where the Christ had to be born. And now God utilized the authority of a pagan governor to have His Son, the Lamb of God, sacrificed for all people. This reminds us who is really in control. It is not the ruler-of-the-moment in local, state, or national government, no matter how powerful or influential they may seem. Everyone in these positions must answer to a power much higher than their own.

Jesus said as much to Pilate when Pilate wasn't getting the answers from Jesus that he wanted. Pilate said, *"Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?"* (Joh. 19:10). Jesus replied, *"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above"* (v. 11). That applies not only to the authority of government, but also to authority in society, church, and home.

Whatever authority God gives you in any sphere of life, He wants it to be used in service to your neighbor. Husbands and fathers are to use their authority in the home not to manipulate or harm, but to give and guide. Ephesians 6:4 says, “*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger [by misusing your authority], but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*” Regarding earthly masters, like employers and managers, God says that they should not mistreat those under them, knowing that they have a Master in heaven, and “*there is no partiality with him*” (Eph. 6:9).

God could have used His authority as the Creator of the world to punish Adam and Eve and we their descendants for all our sins. Instead, the Father used His authority to send His only-begotten Son to suffer and die for everyone. Jesus willingly and perfectly obeyed His Father’s will, never deviating from the path that led Him to the agony and torment of God’s eternal punishment.

As Jesus stood before Pilate, remaining silent while accusations and lies were hurled at Him, neither the Gentile Pilate nor the religious leaders of the Jews understood that Jesus was suffering for them, out of love for them. He was suffering for you, too, for your failure to acknowledge the authorities He has placed over you, and for the times that you used your authority to harm instead of help. His holy blood, the blood of the King of kings and Lord of lords, cleanses you from all those sins. This is most certainly true.

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;
The Master pays the debt His servants owe Him,
Who would not know Him.

The sinless Son of God must die in sadness;
The sinful child of man may live in gladness;
Man forfeited his life and is acquitted –
God is committed. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary #292, vv. 4-5*)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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