

Pilates

## PILATE'S TWO QUESTIONS TO JESUS

Here are four stories all with a similar theme:

A woman's red station wagon was crushed by an elephant at a circus. The owners of the animal apologized, explaining that the animal, for some reason, simply liked to sit on red vehicles. In spite of the damage, the woman's car was still drivable. But on the way to the garage she was stopped short by an accident involving two other cars just ahead of her. When the ambulance arrived a few minutes later the paramedics took one look at her car, then ran over to assist her. "Oh, I wasn't involved in this accident," she explained. "An elephant sat on my car." The paramedics very quickly bundled her off to the hospital for possible shock and head injuries, despite the lady's vehement descriptions of what had truly happened.

Once, when a stubborn disputer seemed unconvinced, Abraham Lincoln said, "Well, let's see how many legs has a cow?" "Four, of course," came the reply. "That's right," agreed Lincoln. "Now suppose you call the cow's tail a leg; how many legs would the cow have?" "Why, five, of course," was the confident reply. "Now, that's where you're wrong," said Lincoln. "Calling a cow's tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."

A ship's captain one day recorded in the ship's log, "First-mate drunk today." It was a true statement, but was the first incident where the mate had been drunk while on duty. The mate pleaded with the captain to amend the statement, but the captain refused, saying it was a true statement and the truth is the truth. The next time the First-mate was in charge of the ship, he recorded in the log, "Captain SOBER today!"

Following a great sermon on lifestyle evangelism one family thought they had better do something to witness to Jesus. So they invited their neighbours to a meal the following Friday night. When it came to the meal, the hostess was keen to show their neighbours that they upheld Christian standards in their home. So she asked their 5 year old son, David, to say grace. David was shy. "I don't know what to say" After an awkward pause, followed by a reassuring smile Mum said, "Well darling, just say what Daddy said at breakfast this morning." Obediently, the boy repeated, "Oh my God, we've got those awful people from next door coming to dinner tonight"

The truth is the truth isn't it? It is incontrovertible isn't it? Yet Pilate, in our Gospel asks: What is the truth? Why? Was it a serious question or a rhetorical one? Was he being flippant or tongue in cheek? Was he being clever or just plain stupid? And why do we have this extract from Jesus' trial as our Gospel today? Why do we have a Holy Week reading on the last Sunday before Advent? Today is the celebration of Christ the King. So maybe, then, it is to do with Pilate's other question at Jesus' trial: ARE you the King of Jews? It is a very interesting gospel passage. It records what may have been the last intimate, personal conversation that Jesus had with another individual before He was crucified. Jesus and Pilate are two men with totally opposing

lifestyles, beliefs and agendas. Pilate comes across agitated, forced to be in the middle of what he sees as a Jewish religious dispute. His sarcastic and curt answers reveal his irritation. Jesus, on the other hand is calm, even majestic in his calmness. Rather than answer Pilate, Jesus becomes the interrogator and judge in his own trial. The tone of Jesus' responses implies no subordination, no begging and no pleading for his life. Pilate is not in control although he thinks he is and pretends to be so. Jesus points out that "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" and Pilate's response is "What is truth?"

The very fact that Pilate asks this question shows that he has no understanding or grasp of the truth of Jesus and the truth of God. Jesus' silence must have been absolutely deafening. Although John's Gospel doesn't refer to it the other Gospels do. I would like to write a book about the silences in the Bible. There are many silences recorded all in different contexts, all conveying a different message. And Jesus' silences in this conversation with Pilate are probably the most dramatic of all. Pilate asks his question and Jesus answers him with a silence that is overwhelming in its meaning. To me it paints a picture of his kingship and in case there should be any question as to what that silence meant, we know from other occasions. Jesus put it into words, once, for the disciple Thomas. "I," he said, "I am the truth" (John 14:6).

Of the 222 verses in the Bible that contain the word "truth", 22 are John's Gospel. Jesus, in our Good News gospel version, stated that he came "to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me" The NIV version says that Jesus came into the world to testify to the truth and everyone on the side of the truth listens to him. The Jerusalem Bible says that Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. The question about the truth resonates all the way back through John's Gospel. "I am the way, the truth and the life", "the law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." And Jesus tells us three times in John's Gospel that the Spirit of God is the "Spirit of Truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13) and in that last verse, we are told that the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth about God and lead us into all the truth. This is in comparison to our often dark and evil world which, according to Paul's second Letter to the Corinthians 4:4, does not believe because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light shining on them, the light that comes from the Good News about the glory of Christ who is the exact likeness of God. Has anything changed from Paul's day? Pilate rejected the truth. In the most part it has been rejected ever since.

Getting into the mind of Pilate during his intimate conversation with Jesus is interesting. In all this Pilate selectively hears Jesus' possible threat to his authority. "So you ARE a king?" and in answering this Jesus redefines his kingdom. He contrasts himself with Pilate. Pilate uses power and authority for selfish ends with no concern for others, for the community, no accounting for love and the truth. Pilate hoards power and destroys people to keep it or increase it. Jesus empowers others and uses his authority to serve, help, support, even to wash the feet of those his followers. Pilate's kingship brings terror and fear even in the midst of order and calm. Jesus' kingship brings

peace, even in the midst of terror and disorder. Pilate's kingship uses violence to divide people by race, ethnicity, and country. Jesus' kingship invites others in and unifies people. Pilate's kingship originates from the will of Caesar and is extremely tenuous. Jesus' kingship originates from doing the will of his Father, and lasts forever. Pilate must have been very anxious, even afraid. What does Jesus tell Pilate? "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting for me. My kingdom is not from here."

That well-known philosopher, Elvis Presley, once said: "Truth is like the sun. You can shut it out for a time but it ain't going away." In the end, cynical, frightened Pilate attempted to crucify the Truth. He placed a label on the Cross mockingly announcing Jesus as The King of the Jews. The deep irony of that was lost on him, for in doing this Pilate was unwittingly announcing the truth. There on the cross the King is crowned not with jeweled trappings familiar to Pilate, Herod and Caesar but with thorns. The truth is about Jesus, about who he is. It is about the kingdom of God. And it is the truth about our world and the real and destructive power of evil. Jesus did not say that religion was the truth, or that his own teachings were the truth, or that what people taught about him was the truth, or that the Bible was the truth, or the church, or any theological doctrine or creed. There are individual truths in all of them, we hope and believe, but individual truths were not what Pilate was after. And us? We are surely after THE truth: the truth about who we are, about life and death, the truth about who God is and about his kingdom, in heaven AND here on earth.

It was Galileo who said that all truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them. In our world of increasing insecurity where powers of evil increasingly try to spread their terror and fear; of a world of increasing uncertainties is there ever a more essential time for us to discover THE truth, the truth that stood in front of Pilate and he couldn't see it, understand it, want anything to do with it. Surely we need to rediscover it for ourselves and help others to rediscover it or find it for the first time. Jesus' kingdom is there right in the middle of the deep divisions of our world. Maybe this intimate conversation with sad, pathetic and frightened Pilate, actually is the foundation story for the identification of Jesus as king. In his own words, he came to testify to the truth. " God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." This is the truth of the kingdom of God and the very focus of the reign of Christ the King.

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