

There is an interesting interplay of power between Pilate and Jesus. On the face of the situation it could be assumed that Pilate has all the power here since he's the governor of Judea and represents all the authority and power of the Roman Empire at the peak of its dominance along the northern and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean Sea. While Jesus is an itinerant Jew who has been arrested on charges brought against him by the Jewish chief priest and leaders. Jesus has been brought before Pilate at the praetorium – the Roman government's headquarters in Jerusalem. This is Pilate's seat of power. . . . And yet, Pilate is hemmed in by the often conflicting demands between keeping things running smoothly with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, and the need to squash any potential uprising against Caesar. So I imagine Pilate was rather surprised, and somewhat suspicious, when the Jewish leaders appeared to want to “help him out” by turning in someone who has made the treasonous claim of being the King of the Jews – when Caesar is clearly their one and only ruler. What do they hope to gain by handing this man over to Pilate? Why do they want Pilate to deal with him? What have they not told Pilate about this man?

Pilate had a lot of questions, but his formal inquiry proved to be rather unsatisfactory. For every question that Pilate asked, Jesus responded by going off on some other tangent. To Pilate's first question: “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus responded with a question for Pilate: “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” That didn't go over well with Pilate. And so he asked Jesus, “What have you done?” To which Jesus responded, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” So his kingdom is not of this world? And does, or doesn't he, have followers? Jesus hasn't clarified anything for Pilate. In an attempt to circle back to the primary charge, Pilate asked Jesus, “So you are a king?” And Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Once again Jesus did not say that he is a king. Jesus only said that his purpose is to testify to the truth, and that people who belong to the truth listen to him. What was Pilate to make of that?! Is, or isn't, Jesus a king? Is, or isn't, Jesus committing treason? Does, or doesn't, Jesus have any followers? Is, or isn't, Jesus leading an insurrection? Why doesn't Jesus answer plainly?

Does it seem to you like Pilate has lost control of this situation – that his power has evaporated? While Pilate is still the official who will decide if Jesus should be released or crucified – that doesn't seem to matter to Jesus. As a matter of fact, Jesus seems rather

unconcerned about what Pilate is going to do. What Jesus does seem concerned about is being true to the kingdom of God, and bringing a witness to that truth.

What is true about the kingdom of God? According to our reading from the book of Revelation – WE are the kingdom. All of the beloved children of God who have been freed from our sins, who form a priesthood of all believers, who choose to give praise and service God – WE make up the kingdom of God who is, and who was, and who is to come. And in this kingdom Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, is the king of kings who chooses to be servant of all. . . . Clearly this is not the kind of kingdom that the world we are living in is familiar with! And it is definitely not the kind of kingdom that Pilate would have recognized! But this is the kind of kingdom we are called to live and serve in.

So how are we to do that? How are we to follow Jesus' example of being a faithful witness to the truth of this kingdom? How can we uphold love, mercy, grace, and peace – the cornerstones of this kingdom – in who we are, and what we do and say? How do we serve others? How do we offer ceaseless praise to God? How is the kingdom of God clearly present in us? . . . These are the questions that are stirred up when we consider our allegiance to Christ as our King.

And if someone were to ask us point blank, “Is Jesus your king?” How would we answer? Is our answer, “Yes!”? . . . Is it? . . . Because if that same person looked at our lives would they see that same answer in how we live? Do our lives vividly demonstrate that Jesus is our king – and that from Alpha to Omega we are a living part of the kingdom of God? Because how we live is a witness to the truth. May we all be faithful witnesses.

Amen.