

Τί ἔστιν ἀλήθεια;

What is truth? A Good Friday Reflection (No. 1)

John 18: 28-40

How good are you at thinking on your feet? How do you perform under pressure?

Pontius Pilate was a man in the last-chance saloon. He had harboured great political aspirations. And while not the most coveted job in world politics, the Roman Governor of Judea was still a significant position.

It was a demanding role, that required diplomacy. It needed a skilled tactician, who understood human behaviour. It needed a “people person,” who would learn the local customs, navigate religious sensibilities, and rub shoulders with the right people.

These qualities, however, do not describe Pontius Pilate.

The all-powerful, all-comforting image of Mother Rome may have worked back home, but out here on the frontier, seasoned politicians well understood that the balance of power was a much more precarious thing.

Twice Pilate had caused a riot. Both occasions *completely* avoidable. And so, twice, news of Pilate’s insensitivity, reached Caesar’s ear. And now the message was clear.

“This is your last chance!”

Pilate wanted to make good, to redeem his chances, to rekindle the dying embers of political ambition.

He and his wife moved from the sea-side comforts of Caesarea, to the Praetorium in Jerusalem, to be present for the Jewish festival of Passover. And, holed up in the barracks, they waited for the whole thing to blow over; only it didn’t, it blew up.

It started as a sound - the sound of distant cheering, like you might hear walking past a sports bar during a world cup. Only the sound grew louder, and angrier, until the captain of the guard came up and said, “you better come and see this, boss.”

Pilate’s first feelings were those of dismay - he had literally done nothing, and now it seemed trouble was determined to seek him out.

On the terrace, Pilate saw a sea of distressed people below – all shouting and shaking their fists. The tension was palpable, feisty. Violence was inevitable.

At the head of the mob were the most senior figures of the political party called the Sadducees. Caiaphas the High Priest was among their number; more alarming still, so too was his father-in-law, Annas, who had ruled the party for decades.

There was an exchange between them and the soldiers on the gate, who minutes later dragged before Pilate some poor wretch who was clearly the cause of the trouble.

“They say you are a king,” Pilate began, “are you the king of the Jews?”

There was a long pause, before the figure spoke in reply.

“Are *you* saying this about me? Or have you just heard that from someone else?”

“Don’t you play word games with me!” Pilate retorted, “Am I Jewish? Do you think I care? Listen to the mob out there! Your own priests, your own people have handed you over to me. So tell me, what have you done?”

“My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would be fighting to rescue me. But my kingdom is not of this world.”

The man’s deluded, or a simpleton,” “Pilate thought to himself. “he’s said some fanciful things, and his contemporaries have taken offence. But he is innocent.”

Pilate thought he would play along. “So you are a king then?”

“*You* say that I am a king. This is my purpose, this is why I was born, this is why I came into the world – that I might tell everyone about the truth. Everyone who is of the truth, listens to my voice.”

“Pfft. What is truth?”

Well, Pilate, what if the truth wasn’t so much of an idea. What if it wasn’t so much of a cosmic principle, but what if truth were a person. What if truth was literally, physically, embodied, in the pathetic figure that stands before you now. What if truth, looked like the beaten man dragged in from the street. What if truth looked like the innocent man you are about to crucify to save your career?

“What is truth?” – Well, Pilate, it is the man standing before you.

Γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου

Woman, Behold Your Son – A Good Friday Reflection (No. 2)

John 19: 1-28

The last wish of a dying man is a powerful thing. The last will and testament of Christ reads, “care for one another.”

Only, Mary doesn't want another son. She wants this one, this dying one. She wants her boy. She knows he was marked for extraordinary things. In the hidden wisdom of the maternal instinct, she knew Jesus would pursue this path. She knew he was marked for trouble. And she knew, in her heart of hearts, that this precious boy was only ever “on loan.” But the man hanging on the tree was *her* son.

She taught the Son of God how to walk. *She* taught the Son of God how to talk. She nursed every bump, bruise and scrape. He may have made the universe, but *she* had made him the man he was today.

And now, she must watch.

But between the agonised gasps of the dying man on the tree, Jesus was breathing life into something new. He was sighing out his *ruach*, his Spirit, into a new form of creation. Breathing life into a new Day, an eighth day. Breathing life into some New Sabbath, in which sons find they have many mothers, and mothers find they have many sons. Jesus builds his Church.

Mary loses a son, but gains another. John loses a brother, but gains a mother. Jesus builds his Church.

Even in death, Jesus is the creator. Jesus builds his Church.

If only Mary knew, in that moment, Christ loved the Church so much, he would not just die for it, but he would live for it.

Mary has her boy, and many more besides.

Jesus, build your Church.

Τετέλεσται

It is Finished – A Good Friday Reflection (No. 3)

John 19: 28-42

“It is finished!”

Words of despair? – maybe, at least until Sunday.

On Sunday those words are transformed into something beautiful.

Those words become my message of hope.

On Sunday, “it is finished” becomes my war-song,
that I chant at the world, the flesh and the devil.

It is finished means I am no longer defined by my sin.

It is finished means I am more than the amassed sum of my brokenness.

It is finished means there is more to me than my failures.

It is finished means, that whatever I have done, I am loved.

It is finished, means, that whatever has been done to me, I am precious.

It is finished, means justice for those robbed of justice.

It is finished, means accountability for those who refuse to be accountable.

It is finished, means mercy for the penitent.

It is finished means I am forgiven.

It is finished means, for the first time, I can be human.

It is finished means, I am home.

And, so, I wait, for Sunday.