

April 7, 2019 Crosswords Pt. 5 John 19:5-16

Several things need to be said. The Bible as a collection of documents contains 4 Gospels. The Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not cohesive in their telling of the story, the history, of the Jesus events. I say it that way for a reason. Not one of the writers, set out to write a definitive “life of Jesus.” That was not the goal of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. They are so obviously not guilty of collusion. What each one set out to do was tell the world, the non believing world, the non Christian world, their first hand experience concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, that HE is the one and only Christ of God, the Messiah, the Saviour promised by the prophets.

Secondly, it is important to take notice, that there are three figures in this final movement in each Gospel: the Jews who want Jesus killed, Pilate who is trying to navigate the difficult political waters of the province of Judea in the Roman Empire, and Jesus, who is hated by the “Jews” and who is in the end condemned to death by crucifixion by Pontius Pilate. Notice this: the Jews as a term does not designate the Jewish people as a whole. The disciples of Jesus, and that group of up to 120 who followed Jesus everywhere, were Jews. The women, such as Mary Magdalene, Mary Jesus’ mother, Salome and others were also Jews. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin (the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem) and so was Joseph of Arimathea, who provided the tomb in which the body

of Jesus was buried. So why do the Gospel writers so loosely use that term, “the Jews”? Specifically they are designating by that term, the Sanhedrin, the Council which opposed Jesus ministry, brought charges against HIM and demanded the death penalty. It also signifies something else. As each, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John set pen to paper, they no longer think of themselves as Jews. They are followers of Jesus who is the Way. Those who want them and their faith in Jesus to be extinguished, call them “Christians”. In the Western world we have lost sight of this Biblical fact. The term Christian was not a complement. It meant that those so described were less than murderers and thieves, in the eyes of those who used that term.

My message to you in each one of these Lenten sermons is this: Jesus was condemned to death because of what HE said about HIMSELF. And to the last moment, HE refused to retract the words that condemned HIM to the cross.

“When Jesus came out wearing the purple robe and the crown of thorns, Pilate said to them (Jesus accusers), ‘here is the man.’” John does not include the part where Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, hoping someone else would deal with this troubling case. Herod was eager. He wanted to see Jesus, hear HIM, and Jesus remained silent. Herod asked Jesus to perform a miracle. Jesus was non responsive. And so Herod decided to have some fun. Jesus was robed and crowned, abused, and when Herod grew bored he sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Pilate has had Jesus flogged. The purple robe was put back on Jesus. A crown of thorns means Jesus loses more blood. And Pilate announces that he sees no basis for a charge against Jesus under Roman Law. And it is at this point that wills collide. The Pharisees demand the death penalty. Pilate says what amounts to, "You want him dead, you kill him. I see no basis for any kind of charge against him." The balance of this crowd wants blood. And in the midst of it all, there is this claim which John attributes to the Pharisees... "He claimed to be the Son of God." John says Pilate is afraid. What is he afraid of? He is afraid of the potential for a riot. There is so much heat in the opposition to Jesus, and the cry for his execution, Pilate can feel things reeling out of hand. He goes back inside. He has Jesus brought before him in private yet again. He asks more questions. "Where do you come from?" Jesus is silent. "Do you not realize I hold your life in my hands?" Jesus replies to that by saying, "You would have no power over me, if it were not given you from above." Jesus is saying, God has given you a role to play in all of this. Do what you must do. As a matter of fact, if all of this gives you a troubled conscience? The person who handed me over to you is guilty of a worse sin than you are. Who handed Jesus over to Pilate? It is not Judas. He too played a role. Jesus is before Pilate because the High Priest, as chairman of the Sanhedrin has directed this strategy.

It is John's testimony that Pilate did try to set Jesus free. However, as we have witnessed in the daily and nightly newscasts of the past weeks, politics can end careers, and has

the potential to destroy governments. Pilate is in the midst of that kind of meatgrinder. And Matthew tells us in the midst of everything that is going on just beyond Pilate's door step, there is a domestic note that comes to his attention. When Pilate is sitting in the judgement seat trying to find a way through this crisis...and that is what it is...a political crisis, his wife sends him a note regarding Jesus. "Don't have anything to do with this innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." It really is a nightmare.

The day is Passover. Pilate does not get all of that, but what he does understand is that he must make a decision. It cannot be put off. Now is the hour. He makes a final appeal. "Here is your king." OOPS! Gasoline on the fire. Crucify him! Crucify him! "Shall I crucify your king?" "We have no king but Caesar." Pilate feels trapped. He signs the order to have Jesus executed by crucifixion. And his one motion of protest is that he takes a basin of water and washes his hands.

Which leaves us with this question: why did Jesus die? It is not about the politics. It is not about the struggle between those who seek to have influence over local affairs and the governmental power that represents the Empire. It is entirely about Jesus. And what Jesus desires is to do what HE came into the world to do. We who gather here are guilty of sin. We seek forgiveness at the hands of a gracious God. We live in a world in which no one is innocent. Jesus died to redeem...you and I who want forgiveness. Jesus died to

redeem...those who use HIS name as a curse word to express their keenest frustrations and anger and disappointment, and their carelessness about God. The cross is about God's love overcoming all the power we have to blame someone else for the terrible wrongs that are done in this world. The cross is about grace. God's redemption at Christ's expense. That is the message, of Matthew, of Mark, of Luke and of John.

Let us pray;

Once again the prayer I am sharing is in fact the verse of a timeless hymn, the lyric of which was penned by a man who knew himself to be guilty of the deaths of hundreds and hundreds of slaves, whose names he never learned. What he understood was that he could never explain away his conduct in business. Believing in Jesus, he pursued transformation, new life, through faith in the grace of God.

Heavenly Father;

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see. It was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved. How precious, did that grace appear, the hour I first believed in Jesus. Amen