



ALL SAINTS CHURCH
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Trial Of Identity Not Of Charges
A meditation by the Rev. Abel E. Lopez
April 2, 2010 - Good Friday

John has the longest and most detailed account of our Lord's hearing before Pilate. In John, we see an increasing sense of awe and dread on the part of Pilate. We are also told of his cynical remark, "What is truth?" (*verse 38*). But perhaps the most interesting contribution John makes is his record of the conversation between Pilate and Jesus. In the other gospels, Jesus says almost nothing. In John's account, Jesus and Pilate do have a conversation of sorts.¹ What have you done? Is never answered and not longer addressed. Pilate already knows that Jesus is innocent. It is not what he has done that concerns Pilate, but who Jesus is. The conversation was not of Jesus' guilt or innocence, but about his identity and his mission. A strong symbol of the whole trial is that of kingship, a theme that emerges as Pilate begins to interrogate Jesus (*18:33-38*).

Pilate represents political might symbolized in the emperor's crown. But Jesus' sovereignty is not "of this world," that is, it represents a very different kind of power--one that gives life; a power already proclaimed in poetic fashion in the very beginning of John's gospel (*1:1-18*) that Jesus came into the world to proclaim the ultimate truth of God's love--those who hear the voice of Jesus know God's truth and live it out in their lives (*8:47*). The truth of God's love--and not violent, oppressive force--is the source of Jesus' power. Pilate, like the religious leaders, is incapable of recognizing this truth² or if he did, he can not stomach what this truth reveals about him and about the powers of this world. When confronted with this truth, is not longer Jesus who is on trial, but Pilate.

Author and Professor Barbara Brown Taylor³ tell us "Jesus stood at the center of the stage like a mirror in which all those around him saw themselves clearly for who they were. And they were so horrified by what they saw that they smashed it. They smashed him, every way they could. One way we Christians have avoided seeing our own reflections in the mirror is to pretend that this is a story about Romans and Jews. As long as they remain the bad characters, then we are off the hook -- or so we think."

She went on to say "I doubt that many of us will end up playing Annas, Caiaphas or Pilate, however. They may have been the ones who gave Jesus the death sentence, but a large part of him had already died before they ever got to him -- the part Judas killed off, then Peter, then all those who fled. Those are the roles with our names on them -- not the enemies but the friends. Jesus, the friend of sinners was shackled by the hate of sinners. The Holy One was

¹ *Jesus before Pilate*. Content by: Bob Deffinbaugh

² *Jesus before Pilate*. Commentary by Donald Senior, C.P

³ *The Christian Century*, March 18-25, 1998, page 283 *The Perfect Mirror* by Barbara Brown Taylor

treated like a despicable criminal; was condemned as a blasphemer. Liars gave false witness against the living Truth. And He who was the resurrection and the life was killed at the hands of people.”

If we are only moved to sympathy today by the account of Good Friday; the betrayal, the suffering, the torture and death of our Lord and manage to believe that it was about them and not us, we will remove ourselves from our individual and collective violent ways in the world. We will not take responsibility; we will not confront that in us which causes suffering, both in ourselves and others.

When I was preparing for this sermon, I had planned to speak of Jesus identity solely. Little I knew. Soon enough I arrived at a point in my writing that I call the “revealing space”. That is the place I arrive when I think I have written everything I had to say, and where I begin to listen and to be preached at. It was at that moment that my own identity began to surface and no longer Jesus’. I knew that I could force my way out and stick with my plan. The living spirit comes to all of us, but we make the choice. We open ourselves to receive it or we simply dismiss it and take flight. I have come to discover in life that my avoidance of contact mechanisms, in this case being confronted with the truth of God, is my internal mechanism for the protection of my privileges and the things that render me a sense of security. Anxiety took more control over me and in an instant a sense of failure, fear of rejection and loss began to surface in the mirror of truth and I wanted to stop writing. Eater is around the corner; If I can just get there, *I said to my self*; I can always come back, perhaps with a therapist and a hundred sessions and look at the mirror again. But an inner voice, a divine voice rushed back to me with a sense of tenderness and nothing of judgment and that inner voice moving toward me whispered: “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Listen! And I felt at that very moment that God doesn’t do therapy, God cures people.” For God’s sake, it was my life and I made the choice of opening and my life began at that moment.

In Genesis shortly after Adam and Eve taste the forbidden fruit, they hear the sound of God in the garden and, in their terror, they hide themselves from before God. Full of shame, Adam tries to escape responsibility. But in trying to hide from God, he succeeds only in hiding from himself. God calls out: Where are you? Of course God knows where Adam is, but needs to engage Adam in the process of finding himself. Adam, to his credit, responds honestly by saying: I heard you coming and I became afraid – so I hid. And in this brutal acknowledgment, this acceptance, he recognizes the ultimate folly of trying to hide from God or from himself. It is in this moment that the rest of his life begins.⁴

In every generation, God calls to every person: ‘Where are you in your world? This question is designed to collapse a person’s intricate system of inner hideouts. It is to awaken a person to where he/she is, and foster within him/her the desire to get out. This is the question we try to ignore, the question that makes us hide deeply within ourselves. And yet, we ultimately know that “everything now depends on whether we are willing to face the question...”

The invitation at this moment is to look at who you are. Who am I? What’s my true identity? If our main purpose is to avoid the pain of anxiety, failure, rejection, and loss in this

⁴ Rosh Hashanah 2009 - If I am Not Myself: A Single Moment of Illuminated Awareness by Rabbi Sharon Brous

moment, we'll sacrifice our own living spirit on the altar of security. Easter will be a joyful noise from outside and not a breath of new life about to be born from within. Don't miss your chance. God doesn't do therapy, God cures people.

And the way it seems to me God does that, is by re-establishing our own image, the way God created each one of us. Genesis tells "in God's image and likeness God created us." And I want to believe that before God rested, God looked at us and smiled. Stay longer at the mirror with the blurred image, with our disfigured lives, our failures, our brokenness, our mistakes, our anger and fears. They will be reflected there, they are a part of us, but we are much more than that. There is no image so blurred that God cannot re-establish it. Our beloved-ness, our humanity, our compassion will surface in the mirror as well and we will truly see that that is who we really are. That's our true identity we are invited to claim.

"Jesus ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." (Jn 18:40) Make no mistake, the claim that we are beloved children of God, that we are sons and daughters of God, is also religious blasphemy. Even though a part of us needs to die in Good Friday our blasphemous lives will be restored with Jesus on Easter.

Amen