



**ALL SAINTS CHURCH**  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

**Jesus, Breaking The Law**  
A meditation by the Rev. Zelda Kennedy  
April 10, 2009 - Good Friday

Every year, I attempt to visit or attend an event that's unique to southern California. Within the past five years, I've traveled quite a bit over this state. Most recently I visited the Crystal Cathedral to view the performance of the *Glory of Easter*. It was a **major** production.

Now, while the story of Jesus' passion was conflated, it still fascinated me to experience the events, as if I were there. The most poignant scene was not the crucifixion or the resurrection or the ascension. The most poignant scene was a portrayal of the reading from the gospel I just shared with you - the scene between Pilate and Jesus, which reflected Pilate's inability to stand up to the religious authorities that asserted Jesus was breaking the law because he told them the truth.

The scene showed Pilate, asking Jesus, "What is truth"? What is truth when your people insist that you should be punished? What is truth when you appear so vulnerable? I have always questioned Pilate's inability to see the truth - the truth that stood before him in the person of Jesus. I have also wondered why he was unable to stand against the religious leaders, especially since they were under his rule?

As I witnessed the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate, the reality of Jesus' passion sobered me. I fully began to understand the nature of our human failings. There was Pilate, adorned with his Roman finery questioning Jesus, who was dirty; bound like a common criminal, yet, uncommon in his dialogue with Pilate. As I watched them discuss Jesus and the nature of truth, the contrast was startling.

In *The Last Week* by Borg and Crossan, they assert, "The execution of Jesus was virtually inevitable. Not because of divine necessity, but because of human inevitability – this is what domination systems did to people who publicly and vigorously challenged them. It happened often in the ancient world." However, they also assert, "Jesus was not simply an unfortunate victim of a domination system's brutality. He was also a protagonist filled with passion his passion, his message, was about the kingdom of God. He spoke to peasants as a voice of peasant religious protest against the central economic and political institutions of his day. All of this was his passion, what he was passionate about: God and the kingdom of God, God and God's passion for justice. At a broad level of generalization, Good Friday was the result of a collision between the passion of Jesus and the normalcy of civilization. This realization generates an additional reflection. According to Mark, Jesus did not die *for* the sin of the world. The language of substitutionary sacrifice is absent from Mark's story. But in an important sense, he was killed *because* of the sin of the world. It was the injustice of

domination systems that killed Jesus, injustice so routine that it is part of the normalcy of civilization.” (pp 161-62)

Just this morning I received a call from a friend of mine, who is a white male serving in a predominantly African American Episcopal church in Texas. He asked if he could share some of his Good Friday sermon with me. As he read about the “normalcy of civilization” while using an example of “lynching” during slavery and Jim Crow, for persons who were breaking the law. I felt sick to my stomach. (Ironically, it was the same sickness I felt when I witnessed the passion of Jesus.) I explained my reaction to his sermon and informed him that I didn’t believe his community was ready to hear **him** speak about lynching of Black people as an example of the “normalcy of civilization.” I explained that although lynching was not as physically present today as in the past, it still existed in more subtle ways. As a white person, preaching to a Black community, his example may create a painful situation for them. I encouraged him to use another example.

As I sat in my office replaying our conversation, I realized that the same feelings I experienced with him were similar to the feelings experienced during the performance of the *Glory of Easter* - that feeling of knowing that breaking the law was determined by who was in power. That feeling of knowing injustice was being done.

However, even with that understanding, I couldn’t help wondering how I would have reacted if I were present to witness Jesus’ passion. Would I have deserted or denied him? Would I have stood by determined not to get involved because I didn’t know the man? Would I have done like Pilate and “caved in” to the desires of the religious leaders and the crowd? Would I have shouted out to “crucify him” like the others?

I want to think that I would have been bravely faithful. Yet, I’m uncertain of how I would have behaved. Isn’t it our human failing? I’m so grateful to know we have choices.

One of those choices is to live in truth. I believe if we can live in truth with healing love we can transform ourselves into a faithful community. We can “renew our commitment to bring more love, to bring more kindness, to bring more open-heartedness, to bring more non-violence, more peace and social justice, more environmental sensitivity and to bring more gratitude into the life we live; into our encounters with others and into the world that we are helping to change and shape.”

On this Good Friday, “I want to challenge us to rejoice in the goodness of all that we are and all that we have been able to live through – taking nothing for granted.” This is the time to embrace our lives to choose whether the grief and pain of Good Friday will be healed and changed to transform the resurrection of Easter into an everyday experience.

Amen.