

THE FIRST 15

Friday, May 17, 2024

Today is Friday, May 17 and we are studying the Gospel of John chapter eighteen.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and Loving God, in the morning I lift my heart to praise you. I pause at the beginning of this upcoming day to seek your presence and put you first. Thank you for always being with me and reminding me that you are working all things together for my good. Help me still my scattered thoughts, calm my breath and focus on your loving kindness. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising. John 18:33-40

REFLECTION

Prior to the crucifixion, Jesus underwent two interrogations - the first by the Jewish religious authorities and the second by the Roman civil authorities. Anna and Caiaphas were the religious authorities and Pontius Pilate was the Roman authority. The Jewish authorities did not have the power to execute a criminal, only the Romans could do that. So the Jewish authorities wanted Jesus to be found guilty by the Roman government officials. So following the interrogations by Annas and Caiaphas, they sent him to Pontius Pilate.

After a long dark lonely night in Caiaphas' dungeon, Jesus was taken in the morning to Herod's Palace to stand before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Herod's Palace was high on the west hill of the city and dominated the landscape. The initial conversation happens outside the palace between Pilate and the Jewish leaders. The Jews do not want to enter the Governor's home because they would become ritually impure before the Sabbath. So Pilate comes outside to them.

The next conversation happens inside the palace between Pilate and Jesus. You may have noticed that Jesus often answers a question with a question. He does so in this instance as well. His answers to Pilate's questions are not straightforward but they are wise. "Are you the king of

the Jews?" asks Pilate. "Who put that idea in your head?" "Everyone on the side of the truth listens to me," says Jesus. "What is truth?" retorted Pilate.

Pilate goes back outside to the Jewish leaders. Other people have now gathered in the morning sunlight and formed a crowd. Pilate reports that he finds no basis for a charge against this man. He offers to release one prisoner as was the custom during the time of the Passover festival. "Do you want me to release the king of the Jews, Jesus?" "No," shouts the crowd, "we want Barabbas." Who was Barabbas? He was a brigand and a criminal. Barabbas was convicted as a robber, murderer and insurrectionist. His life will be spared and Jesus will go to the cross.

Who was in the crowd? Likely many of the same people who in the beginning of the week gathered together waving their palms and spreading their cloaks on the road welcoming Jesus with shouts of Hosanna - "Save us!" Now the same people have gathered outside of Pilate's ornate palace and are shouting "Crucify him!"

Ask: When have I "followed the crowd" and participated in wrongdoing instead of standing up for what is right? When have I chosen the straight and narrow path, but felt criticized and alone?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, everyone turned against you and abandoned you, even your closest disciples and friends. In those times when I feel alone and outnumbered, remind me that you are with me. Give me courage and supply me with the strength I need to stand firm. Shine your light on my heart, give me wisdom to make good choices and empower me to do the right thing in every situation. Even when it goes against the crowd. Amen.