

Matthew 27:24-25

Lent 4 Midweek + The Praetorium + April 3, 2019

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho

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Blood on Us

The Word of the Lord from Matthew 27:24-25: "So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

The trial of Jesus is full of outrageous statements, but I suppose that's what you should expect when people are trying to find a reason to kill the innocent Son of God.

You've already heard the trial before the high priest, where the witnesses can't agree with each other. It doesn't get any better when Jesus is brought before Pilate. When Pilate asks for a specific charge – a particular crime that Jesus has committed, the best he can get is, "If He were not evil, we would not have brought Him to you." That sets the tone for what is to follow: Roman law is actually good stuff, identifying all sorts of crimes. But "being evil" isn't on the books: to be evil before a Roman judge, you have break this or that law. A murderer or a robber is guilty and thus an evildoer; but if a man hasn't broken a specific law, he's innocent in the eyes of the court. You can't just demand that a man be killed because you don't like him. But that's all the priests can come up with.

Take our word for it, Pilate: even if we can't give you a reason why, this Jesus is just a bad guy.

Pilate doesn't bite; and when he interrogates Jesus, Jesus' honest answers give no indication of guilt. By the time the trial is over, Pilate will declare Jesus innocent three times. Once should be enough: once a defendant is declared not guilty, the trial is over and he goes free. Not Jesus, though: after Pilate declares Him innocent the first time, the crowd is unhappy and so Pilate has Jesus – the man he's just declared *innocent* – scourged. After Pilate declares Him innocent the second time, he parades the bloodied Jesus in a purple robe and crown of thorns to make Him look like a mockery of a king, a nobody who's had enough. After Pilate declares Him innocent the third time, he delivers Jesus to be crucified.

If that's how Pilate treats the innocent, you've got to wonder what he does to the guilty. But this isn't the work of a fearsome ruler who wants to show absolute power. Pilate seems a wretched sort of man who has Jesus put to death because he is afraid for his own skin.

In other words, if one of them has to die so that the other can live, Pilate would rather have Jesus die so that he can stay alive.

Still, he wants no part in this fiasco. Though Pilate is no stranger to bloodshed, he wants nothing to do with the death of Jesus; so he brings out a basin of water and ostentatiously washes his hands before the crowd and says, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

As if Pilate can wash away his guilt with water.

It's all such a travesty; but of all the things that sinners say at the trial of Jesus, the most

troubling one to me is the crowd's response to Pilate: "His blood be on us and our children." In other words, they're not afraid to be responsible for Jesus' death. They're convinced that it's the best thing to do. They've listened to the goading of the scribes and the Pharisees spread among them; and if these men say that Jesus is evil and has to die, then Jesus is evil and has to die. No qualms, no fear. This is always, inevitably, where impenitence leads: sinners want God to be dead.

"Let His blood be on us," they say. They'll take the responsibility for this execution, if anybody asks. Shoot, if God Himself wants to know who's responsible for the death of Jesus, they're saying that they'll raise their hands and stake the claim. "His blood is on us," they say. They're so sure that they're right that they don't stop there. They double down and say "His blood be on us *and* our children." In other words, "If we're wrong, let us be cursed! God can feel free to destroy us and our kids too." What a stupid vow. What a foolish curse.

But don't expect evil to be smart. Remember back at the start of Lent, as we looked at the temptation in the wilderness? The devil didn't prove himself a worthy foe when he tempted Jesus, but a bumbling and beaten fool. The trial of Jesus just shows that evil isn't reasonable or rational or smart. It can be cunning and attractive, but it's still a losing game. It just wants to do away with what is holy. It just wants God gone.

If you don't believe me, then feel free to put yourself on trial. Several hot-button issues in politics these days aren't just political, but moral and *doctrinal*. So join a discussion about, oh, the sanctity of life or the sanctity of marriage, share *politely* that you believe society wrong because the Bible says so, and ask *politely* for a reasonable explanation as to why abortion rights or same sex-marriage are rational and moral. I can pretty well assure you that, in many cases, you won't get a polite and reasoned response. You'll probably be informed that you're the problem, that you really need to be quiet, that you're standing in the way of progress; and that, if anyone is guilty of evil-doing in the matter, it's you and your fellow Christians simply for saying what the Bible says. Not all conversations go that way, but a lot certainly do. It doesn't mean you should be quiet; but it does mean that you should expect the world to treat you the same way it treated Jesus. And if the world has no love for you because people say that you sound just like Jesus, well, then blessed are you. Jesus says so.

In fact, Jesus says some surprising things that give you hope and comfort in dark and evil times.

Think back to Pilate and his reasoning at the trial: at the end of the day, he'd rather have the innocent Jesus die so that he can live. The miracle of grace is that Jesus agrees! He's not helpless before Pilate, nor is He powerless on the cross. In His humiliation, He foregoes the use of His almighty power to die for the sins of the world. Just like Pilate, Jesus would rather die so that Pilate can live, so that Pilate might repent and be saved.

Jesus would rather die so that you can live. You really have no moral high ground to look down upon Pilate, for you share the same sinful flesh as he had; and there are plenty of times that you wish that Jesus would just go away so that you could go on with this or that sin. The Lord Jesus declares to you, "My child, I did go away for a while. I went to cross and grave and hell for you; and now I'm risen from the dead to forgive you and deliver you from that sin that would kill you forever.

Think back to Pilate, who tries to wash away his guilt with a little bit of water. He can't. Jesus can. Having borne all of your sins and all of your guilt to the cross, He has visited you in Holy Baptism. With just a little water combined with His Word, He's washed your sins away. You're no longer guilty before God, because you've been cleansed by water and the Word. You're

no longer a wretched sinner trying to justify himself, but a beloved child who is justified by God Himself.

And then there's the curse of the people, "His blood be on us and our children," the claim and curse that they're gladly responsible for the death of Jesus.

Actually, ultimately, they're not responsible: Jesus is. He goes to the cross willingly to shed His blood and sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world – their sins, and your sins too. Because of His sacrifice, says 1 John 1:7, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

The antics of sinners at the trial of Jesus are outrageous as their bondage to evil compels them to execute the Son of God. But though they mean it for evil, God uses it for good. Jesus' death is your life. He has redeemed you and washed you clean; and by His grace, I now speak these surprising words of blessing: the blood of Jesus be on you and your children, for the blood of Jesus cleanses you of all your sin.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen