



Week 4 - Before Pilate

Today's scripture lesson finalizes Jesus' fate. The religious authorities have handed him over to the civil authorities and have asked for a death sentence. The religious leaders convince a crowd, likely full of religious pilgrims attending the Passover festival, to join them in demanding Jesus' crucifixion. It is a dark moment in history that never-the-less fulfills scripture and reveals God's love to us.

Each person makes a choice that brings Jesus closer to death, but each choice feels rational for the decision-maker. We, too, rationalize our choices every day. Our choices are less likely to lead to a crucifixion, but they are still important. Today, we explore what influences our decisions and the importance of taking responsibility for our own actions.



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Begin by praying for God's wisdom to guide the group's collective discernment during your time together.

Jesus was brought before the governor. The governor said, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus replied, "That's what you say." But he didn't answer when the chief priests and the elders accused him.

Then Pilate said, "Don't you hear the testimony they bring against you?" But he didn't answer, not even single word. So the governor was greatly amazed.

It was customary during the festival for the governor to release to the crowd one prisoner, whomever they might choose. At that time there was a well-known prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. When the crowd had come together, Pilate asked them, "Whom would you like me to release to you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus is who is called Christ?" He knew that the leaders of the people had handed him over because of jealousy.

While he was serving as judge, his wife sent this message to him, "Leave that righteous man alone. I've suffered much today in a dream because of him."

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and kill Jesus. The governor said, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

"Barabbas," they replied.

Pilate said, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

They all said, "Crucify him!"

But he said, "Why? What wrong has he done?"

They shouted even louder, "Crucify him!"

Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere and that a riot was starting. So he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I'm innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It's your problem."

All the people relied, "Let his blood be on us and our children."

[Matthew 27:11-25]

The People

- A crowd welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with triumphant shouts just days before a crowd called for his crucifixion. What may have influenced the crowd to change their position? How might they have become so zealous?
- Why do you think Pilate attempts to wash his hands of Jesus' death? How successful do you think he was given history's treatment of him?
- The crowd claims responsibility for Jesus' death. Why are they willing to take on such a heavy burden?

Jesus

- What do you think Jesus means when he says, "That's what you say," in response to Pilate's question? What does this reveal about Jesus' and Pilate's understanding of who Jesus is?
- Jesus is silent before the crowd. Why?

Us

- The crowd shouted in unison to have Jesus crucified. Does their energy surprise you? When have you seen a crowd act in a similar way? What was your response? How hard would it be to resist joining such a crowd?
- Pilate offered the people a choice between Jesus Barabbas and Jesus the Christ, and they chose Barabbas. What does reveal about the factors that influence our decision-making? When have you made the wrong choice? What factors led you to make that choice? Were you able to correct it?
- Pilate attempts to wash his hands of Jesus' death. When have you seen someone attempt to escape responsibility for their actions? How successful were they? How did their effort affect your understanding of them?
- The crowd asks to take responsibility for Jesus' death. How important is it for us to claim responsibility for our actions? Name a time you took responsibility for something that was difficult to admit to.
- How would the world change if no one ever took responsibility for anything?

Close by praying for each person to have the strength to resist making the easy choice.