

It’s an astounding conversation, the one between Pontius Pilate and Jesus of Nazareth. “Are you or are you not a King?” “My kingdom is not of this world.” “What’s that? You are a king, then!” Jesus responds, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate, so modern in his thought process, asks “What is truth?” You can almost see Pilate sizing up the rabbi from Galilee, trying to get a read on why this wandering teacher is in so much trouble. The governor takes his decision to the people: “I find no guilt in him.”

Those who had gathered were not having any of his Roman objectivity. “Crucify Him” was their consistent cry. And when they dared to bring Caesar into the conversation, Pilate knew he had played his last card. It was Caesar who appointed kings, and for Pilate to leave the door open for Jesus to emerge as some self-appointed King of the Jews would never do. Caesar held the keys to Pilate’s own little slice of authority. Pontius Pilate wasn’t about to risk what little security he had for the sake of sticking up for some itinerant preacher.

Exasperated, he brought Jesus before them and said, “Shall I crucify your King?” Did he really think their hearts would soften?

“We have no King but Caesar,” the chief priests answered. It was a lie, and everyone standing there knew it. A lie for the sake of expedience; a lie for the sake of getting your way. Yet another lie that sent Jesus to the cross.

What is like, knowing that you’re sentencing an innocent man to death? Even though he did just that, Pilate signaled something when he ordered the inscription placed over our Lord’s head: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” When the chief priests objected, Pilate refused to change the wording. What he meant by the inscription is hard to say—but one thing is sure: what it said was factual. What was written was true. Jesus was and is the King of the Jews and King of all creation. And a mid-ranking Roman official had signed off on his death. All Jesus would have had to do to stop these proceedings is say the word, you realize that, don’t you? But he submits himself to this. He lowers himself to this. What does He do it for?

Not too long ago a parent asked me how to prepare their sensitive five-year-old child to understand the mood of the Good Friday Tenebrae service: with the darkness, the people walking out in silence; it all seems so gloomy, so deathlike. The more I thought about that, the more significant it became. How do you tell a child that Jesus, your best friend, died for you and because of you? Do you spare that child from the pain and suffering that Jesus went through? Well, maybe a few of the gorier details, but only for a time. Because no matter how old or young you are, you’ll never really understand how much Jesus loves you and the world he made until you see him dying on the cross. You need to take to heart the supreme sacrifice that Jesus made so that you can belong to him. You need to hear his words spoken from the cross; words of

forgiveness, of heaven, of love, of forsakenness, of thirst, of fulfillment, of commitment to the Father. You need to hear it, know it, and believe it, from early age to the day you die.

Why do you need this? Because this is where you need to go whenever you wonder if God really loves you. This is where you need to go whenever you wonder if God really cares. This is where you need to go when your guilt is just too much carry anymore. This is where I need to go whenever I think maybe God is punishing me for something I did.

Go to the cross. See the innocent Son of God dying there. This is the length to which God goes to make you and keep you his own. This is where all sin, all of it, all of yours, is paid for in full. Jesus didn't owe anything, and still he suffered and died to pay off what we owed God. What do you do with a sacrifice like that—with a love like that? How can things ever be same, knowing this was the price that bought your forgiveness?

Go to the cross. This is the King of the Jews. This is the King of the Gentiles. This is the King of the American, the Asian, the African, the European. This is the King who rules by serving. Let Him rule upon the throne of your life.