

Sometimes we try to keep their hands clean in small ways while ignoring larger injustices. Instead of looking deeply at our actions, we choose blindness. This is what is happening in our scripture today from the Gospel of John – of Jesus’ trial. Here we are invited to sit with that dissonance rather than rushing past it.

John 18:28-40

*Trial before Pilate*

<sup>28</sup> The Jewish leaders led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Roman governor’s palace. It was early in the morning. So that they could eat the Passover, the Jewish leaders wouldn’t enter the palace; entering the palace would have made them ritually impure.

<sup>29</sup> So Pilate went out to them and asked, “What charge do you bring against this man?”

<sup>30</sup> They answered, “If he had done nothing wrong, we wouldn’t have handed him over to you.”

<sup>31</sup> Pilate responded, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your Law.”

The Jewish leaders replied, “The Law doesn’t allow us to kill anyone.” (<sup>32</sup> This was so that Jesus’ word might be fulfilled when he indicated how he was going to die.)

<sup>33</sup> Pilate went back into the palace. He summoned Jesus and asked, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others spoken to you about me?”

<sup>35</sup> Pilate responded, “I’m not a Jew, am I? Your nation and its chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?”

<sup>36</sup> Jesus replied, “My kingdom doesn’t originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn’t have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn’t from here.”

<sup>37</sup> “So you are a king?” Pilate said.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice.”

<sup>38</sup> “What is truth?” Pilate asked.

After Pilate said this, he returned to the Jewish leaders and said, “I find no grounds for any charge against him. <sup>39</sup> You have a custom that I release one prisoner for you at Passover. Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?”

<sup>40</sup> They shouted, “Not this man! Give us Barabbas!” (Barabbas was an outlaw.)

Sometimes the most uncomfortable truths in Scripture are the ones that hold up a mirror. We read in the Gospel of John, about religious leaders who were deeply concerned about ritual purity. They arrested Jesus and took him to Pilate’s palace to be judged but they refused to enter. Entering that place would make them unclean for the Passover meal.

That moment is thick with irony. And if we are honest, it is also painfully familiar.

And when we hold John’s story next to Paul’s words that Bryce read from Ephesians, we begin to see that this dissonance is, likely, part of the human condition and we, like the many who have gone before us in faith and life, struggle with this contradiction.

We, like all children of God are given a deeper invitation: To live in the world without becoming shaped by the world and to walk as children of light in a world comfortable with darkness.

When Pilate questioned Jesus, he asked the question everyone was asking: “Are you the king of the Jews?” It is a political question. Pilate dealt with rebels before. He knew self-proclaimed kings lead revolutions; they threatened empire. So he asked Jesus straight out but Jesus’ answer changed the whole conversation.

“My kingdom does not originate from this world. If it did, my followers would be fighting.”

Jesus wasn’t saying his kingdom has nothing to do with the world. Instead, he was saying it does not operate by the world’s methods.

In other words: If Jesus were building power the way the world builds power, there would already be swords drawn; armies would be forming; strategies would be unfolding; people would be rising up and violence would be justified in the name of righteousness, truth, justice and the kingdom of God.

But that is not how the kingdom of God works. Jesus revealed a different kind of politic—one that does not operate through domination, violence, or coercion, money or even fame.

For centuries, Anabaptist followers of Jesus have taken these words seriously. “My kingdom is not of this world.” For our ancestors in the faith, that meant separating ourselves completely from the world around us. I don’t think Jesus meant for us to separate ourselves into isolated and insulated communities.

Jesus’ allegiance was first to God. And God’s politics supersede any demand of the world – it turns the tables upside down. In Jesus’ kingdom the meek inherit the earth, the peacemakers are blessed, the last become first and the king wears a crown of thorns.

The trial of Jesus was filled with irony. Pilate believed he was the judge and the religious leaders believed they were protecting their faith. But Jesus was the one revealing the truth about all of them.

Ultimately, the crowd made a choice. They were offered Jesus—who embodied God’s open arms of love, peace, and righteousness. Instead, they chose Barabbas to free. Barabbas was an insurrectionist, a nationalist, not afraid of who he stepped on or killed to further his agenda; a zealot using religion as an excuse or cover up for initiating a coup; a regime change.

They rejected the Prince of Peace and choose an insurrectionist.

Every generation faces this choice – not necessarily in one dramatic moment like this one in our story today, but in a thousand little choices – small decisions about how we live and our priorities.

This is where Paul’s words in Ephesians become so important. “You were once darkness,” Paul wrote “but now you are light in the Lord...so live your life as children of light.”

Notice Paul didn't just say "walk toward the light." He said, "You **are** light." Like Jesus' "You are the light of the world – a city on a hill." Something has changed within you. Through Christ, through discipleship, through the Spirit, we are no longer defined by the darkness of the world. We belong to a new reality. And because of that, our lives should bear the fruit of Goodness, Justice and truth – not power, dominance or religious superiority, but goodness, justice, truth.

And Paul goes even further. He said we expose the works of darkness, not by shouting louder or grasping for control and overpowering it, but by living lives so radiant with love and integrity that darkness cannot hide.

And here's where dissonance becomes real for us. Christians throughout history have struggled with the temptation of Christendom—the belief that the kingdom of God can be advanced through political power. Sometimes leaders have tried to shape governments to enforce religious values. Sometimes faith has become entangled with nationalism or political agendas. Sometimes the church has begun to look less like the crucified Jesus who gave his life for the sake of all - and more like the powerful who think only for themselves and their gain.

But when we return to John 18, Jesus reminds us: "My kingdom is not from here." That does not mean the kingdom of God has nothing to say about the world. No. It means that God's kingdom operates by different rules. And these rules are: Forgiveness over retaliation, service instead of domination, truth instead of propaganda, love instead of fear and a hand and a listening ear instead of a sword.

We live inside a powerful nation. We benefit from the security provided, the economies, and the social system here. Living as children of light requires discernment and asking complicated questions and then listening and prayer. "Where in my life am I being shaped by the culture around me?" "Where in my life have I become comfortable with things that Jesus would challenge?" "Where does my faith align more with worldly power than with the upside-down kingdom?" "Who holds my ultimate loyalty?"

In a world obsessed with climbing higher, the Spirit calls our church to do opposite – to lift each other up instead.

So what do we do with the dissonance? We can deny it's existence or despair in it's vastness. But we're invited to let this dissonance wake us up.

Faith is not about pretending everything is fine. Faith is about waking up to the truth. About letting Christ's light shine into places that we might prefer to keep hidden. And when that light shines something beautiful begins to happen. Darkness is transformed.

In the trial before Pilate, two kingdoms stood face to face. One kingdom relied on violence, fear, and political maneuvering. The other kingdom stood quietly before its accusers, speaking with integrity the only truth it knew.

Pilate couldn't see it; the crowd couldn't see it. But the writer of the Gospel of John wants us to see it clearly. The true king is the one who refuses the sword. True power is the power of sacrificial love.

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Kingdom Dissonance  
John 18:28-40

Emily Toews

True victory has and is and will come, not through dominance, but through the humility of the cross, and ultimately the power of Life in its best and brightest form is reborn and renewed and resurrected over and through the power of violence and darkness and death.

Which kingdom will we belong to?

Will we choose Barabbas - the familiar and easy way of power and control? Or will we follow Jesus into the strange, upside-down kingdom where truth, justice, goodness, and love shine like light in the darkness?

Paul reminds us:

“You were once darkness.

But now you are light in the Lord.”

So walk as children of light. (Ephesians 5:8)

Wake up sleepers.

Rise from the dead

and Christ will shine on you. (Ephesians 5:14)

Pilate asked, “*What is truth?*”

The Gospel (good news) answers: Truth has a face and his name is Jesus.

Amen.