“Walking in Love”
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Psalm 98 | John 18:33-38
9 November 2025

“Truth? What is truth?” Pilate asks this of Jesus in today’s passage from the Gospel of John 18. As Scripture tells it, Roman soldiers, the chief priests, and the Pharisees deliver Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate, as you may remember from the times we have read this passage during the Easter season, is skeptical–not only skeptical of Jesus, but of his opponents’ claim that the Roman state should punish him unto death. It’s clear that Pilate knows of Jesus in John’s rendition, but perhaps he’s not clear on the specifics of who Jesus really is. We see Pilate wading through assumptions, based on rumors, accusations, and his own judgments, biases, and social power over this man, Jesus. Pilate asks four questions in John 18: 1) “Are you the King of the Jews?”, 2) “What have you done?”, 3) “So, you are a King?”, and 4) “What is truth?” Later on in the Gospel, Pilate declares what he finds true: Jesus has committed no crime and, therefore, should not be punished.

Yet, of course, we know how this story ends–how Pilate’s once crystal-clear truth becomes muddied with further doubts, fears, and assumptions. Corrupt religious leaders and state police taunt Jesus and beg Pilate to crucify him. At last, we hear the words that finally convince Pilate to turn away from truth in John 19. The crowd cries, “he ought to die because he claimed to be the Only Begotten of God” (John 19:7). Pilate’s countenance changes. He becomes angrier and more impatient with Jesus. As Scripture reads, “When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid” (John 19:8). If Pilate frees a man openly defying Caesar, the man that people are calling King, he (Pilate) could face punishment and wrath of his own. Perhaps, Pilate could lose his position as governor. Perhaps, the state would turn on him if anyone found out. The blood-lust crowd found the magic words to turn Pilate from a man capable of finding truth to a man collapsing before the altar of fear and self-interest.

Pontius Pilate is considered one of the foremost villains of the past two-thousand years. He demonstrates a great weakness, a desire to “wash his hands” of a hard decision. It is easier, we read, to kill God’s Only Begotten than it is to risk discomfort and deviation from “what has been” and “the way things are.” Yes, we can make the argument that Pontius Pilate is a man of weak conscience, selfishness, and cowardice, driven by fear-based assumptions. We can, in effect, “wash our hands” of who he is and what he represents to us. We can convince ourselves that if, given Pontius’s social capital and political power, would have abided by the truth, ignored the voices of others and our own fears, and never participated in the crucifixion of the Messiah. We would have been savvier, smarter, more courageous, and spiritually-enlightened enough to see Jesus as Christ, not only as a marginalized and scapegoated migrant. Because we are clearly nothing like Pilate, we have the hubris to believe that *we* would have saved Jesus from the cross. Are we so sure about that?

Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian, Sufi poet, once wrote, “Indulging in our pride, we run after every fleeing image. How odd that being so unimportant we cultivate such grand illusions.” I’ll read that again: Rumi once wrote, “Indulging in our pride, we run after every fleeing image. How odd that being so unimportant we cultivate such grand illusions.” Our pride and fearful ego tell us that we are separate and unique from other beings–other humans, other animals, and other plants and life-forms. We forget that although we are *made* in the imago dei, in God’s image, *we ourselves are not gods*. When I read the Gospel of John’s account of Pontius Pilate in Jesus’s trial, I do not see a purely villainous and heartless ruler. I don’t see a man who enjoys torturing and sentencing an innocent to death. Instead, I see a person–a person who is very human and very much like each and every one of us–caught in the punishing patterns that emerge when ego and unjust systems meet. Underneath the logical and self-righteous veneer of masculine power and prestige, I see in Pilate a scared boy afraid of making a mistake, afraid of getting into trouble, and afraid of losing what he has. I see a man who–by nature of his gender, his religion, his body’s abilities, his socioeconomic status, his

spoken language and nationality, and his connections–the Roman Empire favored and decided should represent the rule of Caesar. Beyond the titles and the training, the authority and the experience, when we whittle Pilate down into who he truly is in John 19, we see a child in desperate need of assurance that he will be safe and that everything will be okay.

I trust that Christ, our Teacher and Redeemer whose divine knowledge transcends all comprehension, knew of the child-selves crying out in Pilate, the religious authorities, and the state police. I trust that Christ could look at all of these people, these opponents tormenting, beating, and judging him, and say, “Oh, you poor, hurt, scared children. Creator, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” I can envision Christ in the middle of this crowd of people, holding and absorbing their crushing and frightening anxiety over what Jesus’s subversive ministry of love means and how it may endanger them. Their adult-selves may not have a logical rationale for being afraid, but their child-selves don’t care–they’re just plain scared, and they’re screaming out to be seen and to be protected.

In the Gospel of Matthew 18, Jesus tells his disciples, “Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (18:3-5). When we peel back the layers of who society has told us we are and the narratives we have constructed for ourselves as adults, we find this small, vulnerable child-self. Jesus tells us this great and mighty truth: one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves, the key way we become one with the kingdom of heaven, is to humble our adult-selves to our child-selves.

I’ll give you an example of how you could prayerfully and in conversation with God return to your child-self. In fact, we can practice this together, if you feel comfortable. I invite you to close your eyes, if that feels safe, or gaze softly ahead. Take a deep breath. Notice the Holy Spirit moving around this space, in and around you, holding you in a loving and comforting embrace. As you’re settling into this time, right here and right now, notice the emotions that are

coming up for you. Are you nervous, anxious, sad, angry? Are you content, sleepy, impatient? Notice these feelings in your body and in your heart. I'd like you now to bring forward a mental image of you as a child–any age is fine. If you aren't a visual thinker, then just imagine what it felt like to be a child. Once your child-self is available to you, pay attention to what they're doing. How are they holding themselves? Where are they? Are they playing? Sleeping? With other children? Alone? What does the world look like around them? Now, imagine this warm glow, this light, that emerges beside your child-self. Out of this warm light, your vision clears, and you see the resurrected Jesus is standing beside your child-self. How does Jesus interact with your child-self? Does he smile at you? Reach out his hand to you? Hug you? Enjoy this moment together. Be free from all other distractions, assumptions, and worries. *Just enjoy this moment together.*

Now, you notice Jesus has started walking. He looks over his shoulder, encouraging you to follow him. He holds out his hand so that you may grasp it, if you weren't already. You see more of the world around you. A path lies before the two of you–a path you didn't notice before. Hand-in-hand, you walk together on this path–your child-self and Jesus. He then speaks to you and calls you by your name. You remember something you've heard from Scripture: "Everyone who seeks the truth hears my voice." In Jesus' voice, in his tender calling of your name, there is truth: truth of your belovedness, truth of your interconnection to all beings, truth that rings out clearly beyond assumptions, doubts, and fears. You two continue walking on the path. In time, your bodies get farther and farther away, until they're just spots on the horizon. Whatever sensations are coming up for you now, sit with them just for a moment longer. We will soon leave this scene and return back to this room. As we prepare to come back, I invite you to take a few deep breaths at your own pace. Feel the floor beneath you and your posture in your seat. When you are ready, you can open your eyes and come back to this space.

Thank you for joining me in this practice. I know it was a little different from what we typically do during sermon time. This was a type of Christian meditation that you can take home with you and even share with others.

Friends, hear the good news: Jesus tells us, “everyone who seeks truth hears my voice.” Do you hear him? Do you hear the truth–the promise–of our Scripture? For, here is what we know to be true. *God* loves us unconditionally for who we are – all of our faults, for our true selves, as children and as adults. *Jesus*, our Redeemer who came to earth fully-human and full-divine, who died at the hands of the Roman Empire, who died, was resurrected, and walked among us again, is the embodiment of peace and new life. We can consistently return to him for renewal of spirit–dying in the ways of old and being reborn again and again into Christ. The *Spirit* nourishes us, comforts us, and holds us–a legacy of the ancient love and guidance that flows within and among all of us. May we go forward to walk in love, as Chist loved us: believing in the good news and trusting in Christ to hold and heal us. Amen.