

Sermon for Good Friday, 2020

Virus, in Latin, *vee-roos*, means poison slime. If it hasn't yet dawned on you, corona is Latin for crown. What is set out before us in John's Gospel today is the great drama (the passion) of Christ's coronation. And here we are, breaking in this new decade, beset by a poison slime that means to rule our lives. Playing their part in both of these are the leaders of the age, hapless self-serving bunglers, squirming to keep their seats at the table of power.

Jesus is arrested and brought before Annas then Caiaphas then finally to the headquarters of Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, a military man, as you would have had to have been, and seemingly a mid-career bureaucrat. He had the impossible job of managing tensions between the occupying Romans and the Jewish people in 1st century Palestine. John's Gospel offers Pilate the acknowledgement of the difficulty of his situation. Pilate has a lazy impatience with the laws and customs of his Jewish subjects, insisting they take Jesus themselves and "judge him according to their own laws." He knows when to throw them a bone and when to crush them mercilessly. The High Priests have a supernatural need to show the people, especially Jesus's followers what horror awaits them should they challenge the status quo or disrupt the alliance between the priestly class and the Roman occupiers. They beg Pilate decrying "We are not permitted to put anyone to death!"

Pilate tries to get to the bottom of things with Jesus. He wants to know what the rabble-rouser has got himself mixed up in. There must have been a new flavor of rebellion bi-monthly. Pilate wants as little unrest as possible. It's likely Pilate had intelligence officers briefing him on the comings and goings of Jesus as he had been drawing crowds. I'm sure some of Pilate's spies found themselves strangely pulled in by the power and compassion of Christ. I'd like to think some of them had their whole system of devotion upended.

Pilate, like the High priests, means to toy with and expose Jesus. Jesus tells him "My kingdom is not from here." He responds "So you are a King." Jesus says, "You say that I am a King." Which is both command and premonition as we'll see. He tells Pilate "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" Pilate asks "What is truth?" Pilate seems wearied but moved. To be the governor of Judea you had to have a cavalier attitude towards sending people off to be crucified. Pilate senses it might be in his best interest to weasel his way out of this particular crucifixion. Pressures increase and before long Pilate is shouting to the Jews "Here is your King! Shall I crucify your King!" The Jews insist they have the very same King as Pilate; the emperor. But Pilate is not yet done insisting that Jesus is King. He has *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* inscribed on the cross in three languages. A Chief priest suggests it should say "*he only said he was.*" And like many of us when faced with editorial advice, Pilate liked his version best. "What I have written, I have written." Unlike the Living God, whose very name is Yahweh "*I am what I will be,*" Pilate is fixed to his own past.

We are in the midst of a history altering catastrophe. Like Christ's disciples we are holed up waiting for the threat to pass us by. Waiting for a sign of hope in the mess we're in. Much that occurs in history is alienating and death dealing. So much of it is unambiguously bad.

The principle symbol of our faith is an instrument of torture and miserable suffocating death. It is also a throne.(Even the Pope says so). Good Friday is in part a Black Mass. We wouldn't take Holy Communion if we gathered.We instead celebrate the instruments of mayhem that brought our Lord to Golgotha. We pay tribute to the bunglers, the demons, the Satanic elements, the bureaucrats, for the part they played in the coronation of Christ the King. What a glorious trick was played on them, before they knew it, they were in the Kingdom of God's Forgiveness.

What could be more estranged from God than a virus? The World never ceases reminding us Paradise was a long, long, time ago.

The Lord takes our fear, our faithlessness, our despair, our ignorance, our self-protectiveness to the grave. He takes what is deathly to death.

The gospel of God's life with us is:

Blessing from suffering,

Peace from chaos,

Life from death.

We don't know it but we're already free from COVID 19.

The one who rises is the one who will raise us up on the last day. By hisBlood, by his new and living way, we'll have the confidence to enter the sanctuary and worship together again.

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