

John 18:38 *“What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

What is truth? I never thought I'd have to ask that. This term used to mean the actual state of a matter; a verified, undisputable fact. We used to be able to tell the difference between a truth and an opinion rather easily. But no longer. We live in a world where absolute truth is out and relative truth reigns. If you can find it on the internet, then it must be truth. If someone labeled as an expert said it, then it must be truth. Even worse, we are finding more and more today is if someone believes it, then it must be truth. People no longer want to be confused by the facts nor accept the actual state of something. They want truth to be whatever they want it to be. They want to claim their feelings to be truth for them. The whole concept of something that is absolutely truth for all people of all time is not something many people want to hold to. More and more people are willing to question and challenge what has long been accepted as truth. It has gotten to the point where we have to ask this question: What is truth?

Pontius Pilate asked the same question of Jesus. In our world we could look at someone asking, “What is truth?” as a bitter cynic, scoffing at what the truth is. But this was not the motive behind Pilate's question of Jesus. He wanted to know what the truth was. He lived in a world that is similar to ours with multiple groups claiming many different and opposing things. He was just a Roman governor trying to do his job and keep the peace. To do that, he had to find out who was telling the truth. Was the Sanhedrin telling the truth about Jesus—that he was claiming to be a king, was subverting the nation and was opposed to paying taxes? They were adamant about this complaint. They were confident in their analysis. They were certain. But Pilate found just the opposite. He found no basis for a complaint against Jesus. Before Pilate stood a man who looked anything but a king. He didn't look like a king. He didn't act like a king. He didn't have the protection detail which a king would have had. There was something about this situation which wasn't right. It made both Pilate and his wife troubled. So when Pilate came to Jesus, he didn't come as a scoffer who was downplaying such a ridiculous claim. He came as one searching for the truth.

We gather before Jesus for the same reason: in search of the truth. It's important that we know the truth. If there is a truth, that means there can be another side which is a lie. For us when we come before Jesus, the truth means the difference between life and death. Just prior to this verse in our text, Jesus had told Pilate, *“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”* That means if Jesus is on the side of truth, his enemy, Satan, is on the other side, the side of lies. And Satan has an ally on his side—the world around us. Here is the truth Jesus came to tell us: He did come to this world to be a king, but not an earthly king like the people of his time expected. He came to be a spiritual king and win a spiritual war against the devil. The truth Jesus shares with us is that we are sinners who cannot keep God's law perfectly. We are sinners who cannot stand before our God because of our sin. The truth is that we deserve to be cast into hell eternally separated from God.

Satan does not want us to believe this truth. Believing this truth about ourselves helps us to see the spiritual king and Savior Jesus came to be. So Satan does everything in his power to get us to exchange this truth about God for a lie. At Jesus time, the Pharisees refused to accept the truth that they were sinners who needed a spiritual Savior to rescue them from their sin. They chose rather to cast their consciences aside and cast Jesus as nothing more than a fraud. The same thing is happening all around us today. Satan uses the world around us to shake our confidence in the truth of Jesus as our Savior from sin. We see people making Jesus into who they want him to be rather than accepting him for who they need him to be. They want him to be a social reformer and activist they can get behind to bring the social change they want. They want him to be their financial planner and grant them financial success. They want him to be the one in love who never judges any lifestyle or habits to be contrary to God's word. People even go so far in our world today to create their own truth or belief system and convince themselves that something is true for no other reason than they want to believe it's true. Or at the very least, they claim that it is true for them, and that's all that matters. Others claim truth is relative to the situation. It might not always be true, but it is in this situation and in this case.

We hear all of this around us and it gets confusing. We can find ourselves in Pilate's shoes trying desperately just to know what is true and what isn't. Truth is a fact that is true for all people no matter what perspective they are looking at it from. Something which is true only part of the time in or in certain situations isn't by definition truth. Jesus not only was true or even truthful, he is the way, the truth and the life. The Bible tells us that grace and truth came through Jesus into the world. So what is truth? Truth is that Jesus of Nazareth is exactly who he claimed to be. More to the point, he is exactly who we needed him to be! In Jesus, God became man. Jesus perfectly obeyed everything his Father had command and faithfully did everything his father had given him to do. He did that as our substitute. The Bible tells us more truth: The wages of sin is death and all have sinned. Sin must be punished by a just and holy God. Jesus took our sins upon himself and offered to suffer our punishment—not only to be rejected by people but even forsaken by his own Father as he hung in agony on the cross. He poured out his holy blood for the forgiveness of all our sins.

For us to accept the truth of Jesus, we need first to accept the truth about ourselves. The reason the world doesn't want the truth is that the world can't handle the truth. Before God, we are not the awesome specimens who have earned God's favor and whom he would love to have on his side. We are sinners who, try as hard as we may, still sin against him and who have disobeyed God's law. The truth is that we are sinners who deserve the eternal punishment of hell for every

sin we commit. We don't need Jesus to be a financial planner or a social protester or just some nice guy who makes us feel good about ourselves. The truth is, we need rescue from sin, death and hell or we would be lost from God for eternity. Thankfully, we see the truth standing before Pilate in his judgment hall. The crowds will choose Barabbas when given the opportunity, but we see Jesus willing to do what he came to do: to give his perfect life to rescue his people from their sins. Through the eyes of faith, God allows us to graciously see a king standing in Pilate's hall, who has revealed the truth to us: He has rescued us from our sins and given us the gracious gift of eternal life in heaven. What a promise this king of truth makes to us: whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Holding on to this truth from Jesus is what gives us certainty in such an uncertain world. We may be getting different reports from different health agencies about how dangerous this virus may be or how long it may be around or how easy it is to transfer from one person to another. While all of the seemingly opposing information may be confusing, there is a truth we can count on through all of this: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. The same God who gave his life to rescue us from sin goes with us each and every day to watch over and protect us. We may get different signals and opinions from the world around us, but God's truth remains constant and the same in every situation. If Jesus came into this world to be a spiritual king and rescue us from our sins, we can know that he isn't in this for his glory, but to bring us to glory. He cares enough for us and loves us so much that he was willing to endure the pain and suffering, mockery and ridicule, and even hell itself to bring us rescue from our sin. He hasn't left us to face this challenge alone but walks with us every single day. He sends his angels to tend to our needs and has promised to always be with us. Our King continues to reign on heaven's throne for the good of his church. This is the truth. This is certain. This we can count on always—no matter what the world around us may say. May God grant us always to know and believe this truth. Amen.