

Yes, The Truth Does Matter 2024  
 Mark 15:1-15 Philippians 2:5-11

### Mark 15:1-15 (New Revised Standard Version)

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

### Philippians 2:5-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

One time a very close friend ran for political office in Virginia.

He had been my Sunday School teacher back in high school,

**and he often spoke with great passion and fervor about  
 integrity, strength of character, values and truth.**

He was a good friend and I had some involvement in his campaign.

It was all going very well and he was way ahead in the polls.

But then in the course of his campaign, he said something foolish,  
 and the newspapers, the media & his opponents pounced all over him.

I sat in on a meeting that he and his campaign manager called.

It was with his staff of strategists and political advisors  
 to work out some ideas for dealing with the situation.

Knowing my friend's character, I thought it was a no-brainer.

Obviously, simply speak the truth and say something like,  
"I mis-spoke. I said something without thinking,  
and regret the foolishness that tumbled out of my mouth.  
And haven't we all said things that we later regret?"

But that's not the direction their conversation took,  
and to just simply tell the truth was not even considered.

Instead, they talked about focus groups and blind polling results,  
and a strategy to deflect & deny that perhaps voters might accept,  
and finally settled on a plan to accuse his political enemies  
and the media of conspiring to mis-represent what he had said.

I guess I was naïve, but it troubled me and disappointed me  
that no one seemed to care about honesty & telling the truth.

It was all smoke and mirrors, and just say whatever is needed to win,  
and let that **determine what his heartfelt convictions would be.**

The main reason I thought he was running for office, **somehow got lost.**  
Integrity and truth, honest values and character  
became casualties to political pragmatism & winning,  
of making **as truth** whatever was the most expedient.

It is unfortunately common, accepted and expected in our world  
that truth, integrity, honor, conviction and character  
are willingly compromised for political or financial gain  
and people will go along with whatever is most convenient...  
**... which also describes what's going on in the Mark passage we read.**

Today we are celebrating Palm Sunday, the week before Easter,  
which marks the joyful & triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem,  
amid palm branches and exuberant **crowds shouting** "hosanna".

Today also called Passion Sunday, because it begins Holy Week,  
which includes Maundy Thursday and the events of Good Friday.  
With the arrest and trials of Jesus, another crowd has gathered,  
only this time **the crowd was shouting**, "crucify him",  
a harsh prelude to his suffering & death on the cross.

The two crowds, two opposite extremes, both within the same week,  
and possibly even some of the same folks were in both crowds --  
---- and so we wonder, how could that have happened?

In each of the 4 Gospels, his preaching, teaching & healing ministry  
led to increasing animosity & conflict with the religious leaders.

Repeatedly they attempted to trick and trip up Jesus in public,  
and each time he exposed their blatant religious hypocrisy,  
and how far they'd drifted away from truth and faithfulness.

The religious establishment, outwardly committed to their religion,  
was absolutely scrupulous in the extreme about following closely  
even the tiniest details of their religious rules and rituals...

... and actually one of the reasons for their hatred and rejection  
was that Jesus wouldn't play along with their religious rules -  
so they saw in him **a serious threat to their religious system.**

Their hypocrisy was most clearly & tragically revealed when despite  
their scrupulous adherence to religious rules and traditions,  
the religious leaders and authorities were quite willing  
to lie, to rely on false witnesses & make false accusations  
**to say & do anything in their effort to be rid of Jesus.**

And actually it went even further and deeper.  
Since they lacked the authority to kill Jesus on their own,  
and were so focused and intent on silencing his voice,  
beyond their willingness to lie and manipulate the truth,  
they're even willing to involve the hated Roman authorities.

They intentionally abandoned any claim of integrity or truth,  
so they could work it out their way, and accomplish their will.

Ironic that the Jewish leaders, so concerned about their religion,  
that they wouldn't even step inside Pilate's headquarters,  
yet they were willing to lie and subvert the truth  
in order to bring about the death of an innocent man.

The text makes it very clear,  
that it wasn't so much that they missed **seeing the truth,**  
as much as, they just didn't care **about the truth...**  
**... which I take as a real and important warning that we should heed.**

Isn't it true that sometimes when we get a full head of steam going,  
that we too can become so intent on whatever it is that we want,  
that sometimes we might shade, spin or subvert the truth,  
or manipulate things a little bit to come out our way?

Obviously, **dishonest manipulation isn't within God's will & purpose.**

When Jesus was brought before the Roman Governor,  
and as he heard the chief priests' accusations against Jesus,  
even Pilate could tell they were lies and untruths... vs. 10-11

For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the  
chief priests stirred up the crowd ...

**Pilate knew the truth, --- but to him the truth didn't really matter.**

The text makes it very clear  
that it isn't so much that he missed **seeing the truth,**

as much as, Pilate just didn't care **about the truth**,  
and so he went along with the popular view... **it was expedient**.

Lacking moral courage and integrity to stand strong for the truth,  
Pilate went along with the sway and demands of the crowd,  
the pressure of the priests manipulating the situation,  
and his opportunity to do justice and the right thing.  
**Truth, justice and integrity were just too costly.**

God entrusts his people to leaders, responsible for serving justice,  
but it was so much easier to just go along with the crowd  
and satisfy the demands of the religious authorities...

... **for Pilate to lead from behind** by following the popular will, vs. 15

So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

The truth is, Pilate didn't find Jesus guilty of any crime.  
Before the whole crowd Pilate declared that Jesus was innocent,  
yet then condemned him to die as the crowd demanded anyway...  
... **and in the end, the truth didn't really matter much to him.**

The life of Jesus was of minor concern to Pilate, just a peasant Jew,  
and the Romans soldiers crucified thousands of Jews in Palestine.

But what seemed like an inconsequential event of no great importance,  
just a minor compromise with integrity, justice, honor and truth  
to accommodate the leader's and the crowd's strident demands...

... in fact became,  
the defining event of Pilate's life, before the whole world,  
earning Pilate permanent mention throughout all of history.

Pilate's name lives on in the historic creeds of the Church-

Nicene Creed:

'and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate'

Apostles' Creed:

'born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and buried.'

I see Pilate as the poster-boy of popular pragmatism  
and taking the easiest path of least resistance...

... and we can clearly see the great evil and harm  
that comes through **such moral and ethical indifference**  
of simply taking the easier path of least resistance.

We too are pressured at times to compromise our honor and integrity,  
and we too can be driven by fear, desire, apathy or expedience,  
to accept the popular and easier -- the more convenient way

**rather than standing in truth, strong and courageous.**

And the truth is, we can be just like Pilate & the religious leaders,  
well aware of God's truth, yet we choose **expedient compromise**,  
and **to live within the easy lies and deceptions of this world.**

Our call is to be distinct – a faithful witness in this world,  
which is no small, insignificant or inconsequential thing.

We are attracted to popular acceptance, to ease and comfort,  
for our lives to run smoothly, and our lives to be free of hassle.

But the warning in Scripture is clear,  
that the world runs counter to God and godly values,  
culture is against the intentions and will of God.

Our goal as God's own beloved recipients of grace and the Holy Spirit,  
is to let that Presence guide us, our affections and desires  
toward a more authentic and livelier, more joyful and intentional  
**life-journey of faith within the will & purpose of Jesus Christ**  
**that asks, am I truthfully reflecting God's grace and intent?**

As Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, vs. 5-8

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus**, who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but **emptied himself**, taking the form of a  
slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and **became**  
**obedient** to the point of death— even death on a cross.

**So what was the example of Jesus Christ?, or the "mind of Christ"?**

It was humble servanthood, truth and compassion, in contrast  
to easy, faithless and expedient compromise with the world.

The lesson is that Jesus surrendered his power and status as God,  
accepting the status of human flesh, even dying a slave's death...

**... his whole life submitted to the Father's will & purpose-**

- and from that example, Paul is urging the Philippian Christians  
to surrender any selfish or convenient compromise with culture,  
**and allow God to use us to be a blessing toward others.**

So as we move into Holy Week, we need to trust that the Lord  
does have something special in mind for each one of us,

and God wants and desires good and blessing for each of us,  
and for that gracious truth to encourage, heal & change us,  
**and for that to influence & guide our values, desires and goals**  
**and redirect everything about the way that we choose to live.**

Our call and our task, especially this week,

is to look for what God is doing in our lives and in our world,  
which connects each of us with the life and teaching of Jesus...

...our part in the amazing story of faith **that is still being written.**

God says, "I love you, that's why I made you the way you are.

I did it on purpose, because I have amazing plans for you,

**so, don't compromise that for convenience, popularity or expedience,**  
but grow in truth and develop as I created you in wonder to become,  
and trust me, **that I will bring you where you need to end up,**  
which might begin with our relationships in life, home & workplace.

Opportunities abound and there are incredible possibilities  
to offer hope and paths toward reconciliation and justice  
by finding ways to communicate God's mercy and acceptance...

...so the truth of God's grace and compassion can leak out  
and spill onto the needs of someone else, **as a sign ...**

**... that God is still at work and still accomplishing grace and good  
in our lives, in this church and out the world today, right now.**

As we read in the meditation before worship today,

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey... He was  
wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us  
whole, and by his bruises we are healed.*

**And that is the Truth we are called to receive, to proclaim and to live.**