

What is Truth?

John 18:33-38

I remember a few years ago that there was a programme on the TV called Wacaday fronted amongst others by Timmy Mallett. Do you remember that? If you saw it, how could you possibly forget! It was total rubbish. One of the highlights, apart from hitting children on the head with a large foam mallet, was that Timmy would tell a most fantastic story that was patently completely nonsense. At the end he said "and of course, I know this story is true – I made it up myself!"

I want to focus my reflection this morning on just one part of the passage that was read for us. Let me briefly read it again.

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35 Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." 37 Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." 38 Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

Jesus was brought before Pilate because the Jews wanted him executed. It was Pilate's job to judge Jesus, to find the truth. Pilate's opening words are recorded in each of the four gospels "Are you the King of the Jews?" That was the charge that Jesus was being accused of. It was a serious charge. If Pilate found him guilty of it, he would execute Jesus as Rome was the only legitimate power in Judea. So was Jesus claiming to be a king to oppose Roman Rule?

The picture that John paints for us here is what a travesty the trial actually was – actually if I had time we would also look at the trial before Annas and Caiaphas which was pretty illegitimate too. Jesus straight away asks Pilate whether the charge was from him or whether he had been put up to it. Of course, Pilate's answer is that he's been put up to it by the chief priests. The way Pilate asks the questions shows he knew little about Jesus. It was obvious that Pilate had not been bothered about Jesus up to this point.

The only thing Pilate really needed to know was whether Jesus claimed to be King of the Jews. The answer couldn't be clearer. *"My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." 37 Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*

Jesus was a king, but not of this world. For Pilate that was the right answer. Jesus was not the King of the Jews: He was not opposing Roman rule. His followers were not being encouraged to rise up against the Jews – or the Romans. The verdict: not guilty. That was the truth of the matter. It did not concern his court.

So how come Jesus got to be executed? Because Pilate's attitude to truth was not the same as Jesus'. *For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.* Jesus came into the world to testify to the truth. He came to say it as it was between God and the human race. John testifies many of these words in his gospel: *John:3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17*

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Jesus told the truth and that should have got Him acquitted – the Romans and Pilate in particular weren't interested at that time in what the Jews believed, just that they behaved.

Jesus said to Pilate: *Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*

But Pilate's reply to that was "What is truth?" Were they the words of someone searching for truth? No. They were more dismissive. Truth was not uppermost in his mind. He was more concerned with the mob. He knew if he did not crucify Jesus he would have a problem both political and in terms of public order. We know from the other gospels that he did agonise a bit about it and even did the hand-washing bit and John recalls here of the way in which Pilate tried to trade Jesus for Barabbas.

But that wasn't the issue. Under Roman law Jesus should have been freed. But for Barabbas, expediency trumped truth and Jesus was sent for crucifixion.

Those words ring out again this Good Friday morning. "What is truth?" Good Friday reminds us afresh of what Jesus suffered in order that He might redeem us. The sham trial Jesus got off Pilate was just one of a catalogue of travesties followed by the horrors of beating, scourging, mocking, carrying a cross, the pain of the nails, the agony of hanging on the cross. The One that was without sin was made sin for us.

We will testify to this as we walk through town this morning. We will testify as we worship at the Triangle. We will testify as we hear the message. And people will walk by. "What is truth" to them? For many they won't be bothered. For some, like Pilate they may be, but the pressure of life, pressures from their friends and family, or just the need to just get on and do stuff, will mean that they never allow themselves to come to the point of following Jesus. Let's pray that the message of hope that Good Friday brings, will penetrate into people's hearts and minds this morning. May this be a turning point day for them.

But for us, the same question applies. "What is truth?" Jesus said: *Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.* Are we listening? Is the message of Good Friday going to make a difference to us, the disciples of Jesus this morning.

The message of Jesus is "I died for you. So what are you going to do about it? As we have considered afresh the sufferings of Jesus, just what He went through for us: what difference has that made in our lives. But more importantly, what difference is it going to make to us this Easter and beyond. We live in a world and society that is increasingly depressing to even think about for most people; in Jesus there is life and hope. People need to know the truth! So let them have it. Let's pray for those of our friends and families and neighbours who so desperately need Jesus. Let's take every opportunity to be salt and light to them. It's our job as Jesus' church here in Walton. Let's make that difference.