

Sermon for Sunday, January 11, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"TAKING THE EASY WAY OUT"

St. John 18:28-19:22

Text: "Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?' After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again, and told them, 'I find no crime in him.'"

--St. John 18:38

Pilate had two jobs that were not always compatible. First, he was charged with keeping the peace in Judea, and that was no easy job. His second responsibility was to administer Roman justice. Keeping the peace and administering justice were not always compatible for Pilate. The trial of Jesus was a case in point. If he did not do what the Jews wanted done to Jesus he faced the very real risk of a rebellion and insurrection. Peace would be destroyed. If he did to Jesus what the Jews wanted, Roman justice would be violated.

What do you do when you are faced with conflicting duties? What do you do when some hard decision about life has to be made? What do you do when you must choose between alternatives that bring difficulties with them? Well, the first thing Pilate did was to try to avoid responsibility. Three times he tried to duck. First he said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." But the Jews wouldn't settle for that. They wanted blood and they were not permitted to administer the death penalty. So, they charged him with insurrection saying, "We found this man perverting our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ the King." (Luke 23:5) But in their charges Pilate discovers Jesus is from Galilee and again he tries to avoid responsibility. He sends them off to Herod, who is king over Galilee. That was the easy way out--to let Herod handle it. But Herod sends Jesus back. A third time Pilate tries to avoid responsibility. Each year at passover it was customary to release a prisoner, so he sent to the dungeons and brought out the most despicable prisoner he could find, a cut-throat named Barabbas. Surely, he must have thought, the Jews would prefer letting Jesus go to Barabbas. How stunned he must have been when he cried out, "Whom will you that I release to you?" and the roar of the crowd came back, "Barabbas!"

Do you ever try to avoid responsibility and take the easy way out? Try a few things on for size: How about this: "Mr. Jones, will you tithe this year?" "Oh, I'd like to, but I have a kid in college, you know." "Mr. Smith, will you teach in the Sunday School?" "Oh, that would be nice, but I have a busy schedule this year." "Mr. Green, will you be a youth advisor to the young people?" "Oh, I'd like to, but I don't know much about the Bible." "Well, Mr. Green, will you take a course in Bible study?" "Well, actually, I bowl on Tuesdays and have a regular tennis match on Thursdays, and I just don't have time."

The second thing Pilate did was to avoid facing up to truth. He asked Jesus if he was a king and Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate knew the truth. He goes out and says to the Jews, "I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving of death has been done by him. I will therefore..." I will therefore what? I will therefore declare him innocent? I will therefore release him? I will therefore protect him by all the power of Rome? I will therefore what? "I will therefore chastise him..." (Luke 23:16) So Pilate offered a compromise. He knew the truth, but he offered to

compromise and beat Jesus to please the Jews. That was the easy way out--he didn't face up to truth. Either Jesus was guilty and deserving of death or he was innocent and deserved protection and freedom. But in compromise, in taking the easy way out, truth got distorted.

What kind of a world do we live in today? Is it a world where truth is not important and expediency is best? Sometimes it looks that way. Watergate and all its consequences took that approach. But if we live in a world where truth is important, then we must be true no matter what the consequences. And that goes for every area of your life --if truth is important, somebody has to stand for truth no matter what the personal consequences. And that goes for your relationship to Jesus, too. A lot of us are like Pilate when it comes to Jesus. We don't condemn him, but we won't champion him either. We claim him on Sunday and deny him on Monday by the way we live and we certainly don't want the world to know we have a love affair with Jesus Christ. Yet, either Jesus is the absolute Lord of our lives or he is really nothing in our lives. There really isn't any compromise with truth as Pilate found out. Do you take the easy way out when it comes to the truth about Jesus?

There was a third way that Pilate tried to take the easy way out. He refused to face up to guilt. In the providence of God it fell to Pilate's lot to be sitting on the seat of justice when Jesus stood there that day. Pilate took the easy way out when faced with a hard decision and pronounced the death sentence upon the very Son of God. But he wouldn't face his guilt. The Bible says, "He took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." (Matthew 27:24) And that was pretty easy--just to wash his hands of the whole affair and put the blame somewhere else.

Are we facing our guilt? I want to say to all of us this morning, we cannot escape responsibility for who we are and for what we do. We can try to blame environment, circumstances, heredity, or bad luck. We can blame our wife or the preacher or any other person. Yet, when we stand before God at the last judgment, we will have to account for ourselves. We can't wash our hands then. Have you truly loved Jesus? Why not? Have you really served him? Why not? Is he the absolute Lord of your life? Why not? Are you a good steward of his bounty? Why not? Have you let his Spirit possess your heart and life? Why not? You see, you can't wash your hands of that.

Jesus came to a hard place in life. I suppose he could have taken the easy way out. If he had, all would have been lost--including you and me. But he didn't--he faced what was before him. Before us this morning is the symbol of his broken body and shed blood--done for us that through his death we might have life. To take the Lord's Supper is to acknowledge him as your Savior. And after you've taken this Holy Communion, will you go back out into the world to live for him, or will you take the easy way out? That's a decision you have to make. But remember this: In the end--like Pilate--you will stand or fall before God on the basis of that decision.