

Behold what a man!

Sermon on 5th Sunday in Lent



28 Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" 30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." 31 Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. 32 This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die. 33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" 34 "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" 35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." 37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." 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. 39 But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" 40 They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising. 1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. 2 The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe 3 and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face. 4 Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." 5 When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

Pilate was tired. He had already served as the emperor's governor in Jerusalem for several years. And now he was fed up with the constant disputes with his Jewish subjects. He always had to deal with rebels. They would prefer to kill every Roman immediately. And then there were those pesky scribes: When it came to their own power, they were not ashamed of exploiting people or lying through their teeth. And yet they meticulously adhered to all the purity laws. Just so they would look good in front of people. "What nonsense!" Now he even had to meet this bunch in front of the palace. "Because they supposedly didn't want to be defiled by us Romans!" What a strange lot, you could smell the stink of the Jewish backyard from afar with every single one of them and yet they do not want to enter my palace where you can eat your breakfast off the floor... When he finally dared to go outside with the state robe, he was met by loud roars... and then a look he would never forget. The rebel they were presenting stood before him and it was he who brought him to a halt. Pilate could see immediately that this man was no ordinary troublemaker. He not only radiated love and composure. But he also carried himself with such self-confidence that Pilate became curious. Who was this Jesus? In a private conversation with Jesus, the two quickly got down to business. Jesus had been sued as a rebel leader, but had no

political pretensions at all. His claim was much higher. He was not only a witness to the truth, but the reign of God shone through him. Pilate was a human being, just like the corrupt Jews were. Jesus exposed the corruption and untruth. That is why Jesus had to die. Pilate also felt touched in his conscience. Every person who meets Jesus can testify to this feeling. Every person has an idea of what it means to be righteous before God. And every person also has an idea that they themselves are not righteous. At the time of creation, God had already given Adam the task of being the shepherd of all creation. And Adam broke his commission. Pilate was a shepherd of the province of Judea. And yet he was a human being, like Adam. He sensed the contradiction within himself. On the one hand, he recognized that Jesus was innocent and that his condemnation was screaming proof of the injustice of mankind. And he Pilate had the power to prevent the death of this innocent man. But he was afraid. He felt within himself that his own fame and his own life were more important than saving this man's life. In normal circumstances, Pilate would have had no problem condemning this Jesus. But there he was now. And he could see so clearly. In this Jesus, God himself appears before him. And not only that.... In this Jesus, Pilate could also clearly recognize God's will for his own life. Before Pilate's eyes, he was able to review his entire life. He remembered how he had tortured his younger siblings. His whole career played out before his inner eye. And it was the same game over and over again. He had disadvantaged people, cheated them, diminished them in order to become bigger himself. Until then, he had been able to exonerate himself. You couldn't have moral qualms when you want to get to the top. That's how he had always explained it to his wife. But, before Jesus, it all looked very different: "What is truth?" His question finally came out in a stammer. And Pilate must have felt ashamed when he realized that the Roman governor was suddenly standing before a simple Jewish man as a suppliant. And then his face suddenly became clear. He wanted to do the right thing! HE absolutely did not want to be drawn into any more intrigues. He simply wanted to get something from this righteous man standing before him. He wanted that so much! He went before the public and stood before the Jewish crowd again as a representative of Roman authority: "I find no fault in him!" When he saw the people and when the cries of the people came to him like a wave, he suddenly realized how tricky the situation had become. This thing had now gotten completely out of hand. It could even become an open rebellion! And then he had a brilliant idea. There was a real criminal and robber in prison. It had never happened before that the Romans had released someone like that. If he were to present him, everyone would have to recognize who was less guilty: Jesus or Barabbas! But his words choked in his throat when he heard the cries: "Not this one, but Barabbas!" They were to crucify Jesus, Barabbas was to go free. Pilate knew that he had suffered a defeat. He had gotten a glimmer of what God and what justice and what truth would mean. He had a glimmer of what God and what justice and truth would mean. And he placed himself on the side of injustice and deceit....once again He dared to take one last look at this Jesus: and the sight touched him deeply. Pilate knew it: Jesus was a king. But what he saw was a caricature of a king: they had placed a crown of thorns on his head. The cloak could barely hide the blood. King Jesus was standing in his own blood. The blood dripped accusingly from his face and hands to the ground. And it became clear that the only blood this Jesus ever had on his hands was his own. And every drop of blood dripping to the ground resonated love and kindness. "Look what a man!" he sighed: not a troublemaker, not a corrupt man, not a power-hungry man, not a liar... A man as he himself had always wanted to be... but unfortunately could not be.

Jesus' interrogation before Pilate is brief. And yet this story clearly shows us that neither the Jews nor Pilate had any power over Jesus' crucifixion. And even if Jesus is the victim of a corrupt regime, it is nevertheless clear that he is not a pawn of the powerful. In Jesus we find more than all that! Jesus himself had indicated from the beginning that crucifixion would be his way. And

Jesus follows this path, even without Pilate. Pilate recognizes that everything should be different in Jesus... He recognizes this and shrinks back. The Jewish scholars also recognized it and knew that they did not want this truth that Jesus represented. Because if they agreed with Jesus, they would have to change. They would not only have to observe external rituals, but change themselves.

And this is where the story of the crucifixion becomes our story. Who is the king of my life? Jesus is my role model, but He is more than that. I admire Jesus, but Jesus wants more than my admiration! I also feel the contradiction of my life when I stand before Jesus. Do I really want everything to be brought to light through Jesus? How often have I been faced with a decision myself? Like a scale, I held the options in both my hands in front of me: to lie or not to lie? To stand on the side of the weak, or to preserve my own power and name? Believing in Jesus means more than admiring him from afar. I want Jesus to be my king from now on. But do I really want him to dwell in my heart and reveal everything? Do I want to place myself and my will under his will? Jesus is not just a sacrifice, he is a king and he is not just a king, but also a high priest who stands between my sins and God. And this Jesus not only has the power, but also the right to say: "Today you will be with me in paradise." Amen.