

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, Wash.  
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*Matthew 27:19,20*

*Pilate's Wife: "Have Nothing to Do with Jesus!"*

- 1. The truth in her words*
- 2. The tragedy in her words*

Hymns: "Remember Your Love" – 713 –  
Distribution: 115, 105 – 347

*Matt 27:19-20 –*

*While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.*

This time of year many people are going to watch "*The Passion of the Christ.*" For some, it can be a very emotional experience to see this movie. It can leave a person feeling somewhat stunned after seeing how horrible flogging and crucifixion really were.

If you do watch the movie this Lent, you should realize that although it is quite close to the Bible's account of the suffering and death of Jesus, it does add a few details that aren't in the Bible:

- The legend of Veronica wiping the Savior's face as he carries the cross

- The legend of his mother Mary helping Jesus pick up the cross when he falls
- And... much about Pilate's wife

I suppose that in making a movie about Jesus' suffering and death, someone felt it necessary to fill in some details to make it a smoother narrative. However, a person might come away from the movie thinking that we know a great deal about Pilate's wife. The truth is that we have only two verses in Scripture that tell us anything; we know very little.

**As we continue this Lenten sermon series on "*Women of the Lenten Story,*" we focus on Pilate's wife's brief account in Matthew 27. We will hear what she says and learn:**

- 1. The truth in her words**
- 2. The tragedy in her words**

**1** – We read in Matthew 27, "*While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'* But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed."

Have you had a disturbing dream lately, a real nightmare? Have you woken up in a sweat after tossing and turning? Perhaps you had trouble going back to sleep because you were so unnerved and disturbed. You just couldn't forget it. Pilate's wife had such a dream on the first Good Friday. Jesus was brought to trial before her husband, and God chose to send a warning to her in the form of a dream. Although the Lord doesn't normally work through dreams, he certainly had done so at times:

- Jacob and the stairway to heaven

- Pharaoh of Egypt before the seven years of famine
- Joseph, fiancé of Mary, who was not going to follow through with the wedding
- And more!

We don't know details about her disturbing nightmare. One of the few pieces of art depicting this account is in your Worship Notes today, an engraving by Alphonse Francois from 1879. Did she have a nightmare of Jesus on trial before her husband where he condemned an innocent man? Did she have a vision of Jesus being flogged and crucified unjustly because of her husband? Did she see her husband losing his governor's office or even worse because of this injustice? We're not told. All we know is that she was suffering anguish and unrest because of Jesus' trial.

The important fact to remember is why: Jesus was innocent. Actually, the Greek word used here is "righteous." Remember the significance of that word? "Righteousness" is a holy standing before God the Father. This Greek word is also the root word for "justification." Jesus was holy and innocent in his Father's sight, not only innocent in some court of law.

Pilate knew this Jesus was innocent of the charges brought before him. In the Gospel of John we have the line of questioning that Pilate followed in the first part of this trial. After he questions Jesus, he comes out to the crowd and says, *"I find no basis for a charge against him."* Matthew tells us that he knew *"it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him."* The problem was that Pilate had to keep the peace with this volatile nation during this volatile time of year.

Since Pilate knew his wife spoke the truth, he tried many times to free Jesus or at least pass the buck:

- Luke's account tells us that when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him to King Herod who was in Jerusalem that day. His hope was that this case would be off his table and that Herod could take care of figuring it out.
- When that didn't work, he gave the crowd a choice of which prisoner to release to them, which was a custom of his at this time of year. He put a notorious, evil criminal named Barabbas up as the alternate choice instead of Jesus. Whom did they want to choose? However, they were persuaded by the religious leaders to pick the murderer and let Jesus be crucified.
- When that didn't work, we read in John 19: *"Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' And they struck him in the face. Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.'" When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!'"*

- Pilate tried one other tactic to attempt to clear himself of wrongdoing in condemning an innocent man. Matthew 27 tells us: *“He took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”*

**What was the result of Pilate’s trial? Pilate’s wife had spoken the truth! “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man!” Yet the righteous, innocent One was condemned to die.** We wonder if later on Pilate was like many a man who has had to say, “I should have listened to my wife. She knew what she was talking about!” What truth was in her words.

What is our first lesson from Pilate’s wife today? What truth her words contain for us to remember as well. The righteous has been condemned. This has happened in a more profound way than Pilate could fathom so long ago.

Hebrews 4 says, *“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* Christ is the “Righteous One.” Despite the real temptations that he had to face, as we do, he was perfect! He had not succumbed to temptations toward:

- Dishonesty
- Greed
- Hatred

- Lust
- Violence
- Anger
- Disrespect

**He lived the perfect life that we have not lived, and he did it as our substitute so we could be righteous before God.**

How vitally important it is that we also have a “Righteous One” who was condemned and crucified. Our first lesson today tells us why: *“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed... He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”* (Isaiah 53:4-7) When we could not pay for our sins, the “Righteous One” took our sin and punishment on himself.

We have this concept pictured so clearly in Scripture:

- **The Passover lamb from the Old Testament** – In the Passover meal, God commanded his people to select and slaughter a perfect, male, year-old lamb from the herd. Can you imagine a more innocent creature than that? Today, we might think of a little puppy dog, cute as can be, that you have to slaughter and spread its blood around your doorframe so the Angel of Death can pass over your dwelling. An innocent victim!
- **Barabbas** – He is a clear picture of the result for us that the “Righteous One” being

condemned. It's not fair that the rebel and murderer went free and the innocent one was condemned. However, this is exactly what happened to you. We guilty ones go free and our punishment is put on another. 2 Corinthians 5 tells us, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

**What truth we learn from the words of Pilate's wife this Lent. "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man!" The innocent Lamb of God is the exact Savior we need for our salvation, living our perfect life and dying our just death.**

**2** – That's the truth in the memo from Pilate's wife to her husband. But did you see a second way we can look at her words? Did you also notice the tragic implications of that message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man"?

We wonder what the "rest of the story" was for Pilate and his wife. Would they never have anything to do with Jesus again? Some legends have come down to us that are hopeful. One legend tells us that Pilate's wife became a Christian. Another more imaginative story tells us that she had been one all along and that Jesus had healed her crippled son. In fact, the Eastern Orthodox Church has made Pilate's wife an official saint, naming her Saint Procula and celebrating her day on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

Another fanciful legend states that both Pilate and his wife became Christians, and that Pilate was martyred. In fact, the Ethiopian Church has made both of them official saints and celebrates their day together on June 25<sup>th</sup>!

Other legends relay sad endings to their story. We have accounts of Pilate being transferred from his post in Palestine and eventually being exiled and committing suicide. If Pilate did indeed meet a tragic end and had "nothing to do with Jesus" for the rest of his life, can you imagine the regret he feels now? He met the Son of God and had his day on God's stage, and blew his opportunity to do what was right or at least repent of his unjust decision later on.

**We learn from Pilate's wife as we think of her words in this second way. "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man!" Wouldn't it be tragic if that were the case for us?**

How long have you known Jesus? We have a clearer view of his life and ministry than Pilate ever did:

- We live in New Testament times, where we see the entire revelation and explanation of the plan of God in Scripture
- Many of you were baptized as infants
- You may have been instructed from early on by your parents and in Sunday School and Lutheran elementary school.
- You were confirmed in the faith at God's altar.
- You have received the Lord's Supper countless times.
- You have been in worship and heard sermons based on God's Word.
- You have attended Bible classes to grow in faith.
- You have seen many Lents over the course of your life.

- You have served as a Christian counselor to friends who needed your godly advice.

Could you lose it all? And how tragic would that be? To see a serious example, we have to look no further than God's chosen people of the Old Testament, the Jewish nation. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9: *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."* Paul talks about how vital it was to keep the faith and stay close to the Lord so that he will not be disqualified in the end. Isn't that interesting that the greatest missionary of New Testament times realized he needed to "compete hard" to keep the faith?

How much more so for us!

- How tragic it would be to succumb to the doubts that the devil plants in your mind about what God has said in his Word
- How tragic it would be not to fight and avoid temptation
- How tragic it would be to bring shame on God's name by great and shameful sins
- How tragic it would be if you succumb to peer pressure and join the crowd
- How tragic it would be if you lost your faith
- How tragic if in the end, when it's all said and done, we "have

nothing to do with Jesus" on Judgment Day and wonder what exactly happened

**May we learn from Pilate's wife and by the power of the Spirit have everything to do with Jesus, avoiding a tragic end! May his Word and sacraments strengthen us throughout life.**

Remember Pilate's wife! We've seen today that we don't know many details about her, but she teaches us **deep lessons this Lent:**

1. **See the truth in her words – "Don't have anything to do with that righteous man" – and rejoice that we do have the perfect Savior.**
2. **See the tragedy in her words, and resolve that we will have everything to do with Jesus in our life**

May God grant us the faith to remember these words and follow Jesus! Amen.