

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.'*

I remember a cold day in Dubuque, Iowa. Sue and I were newly married, living in a trailer. The furnace stopped working. When the temperature dropped overnight the pipes would be freezing, bursting – a crisis. I went to the Yellow Pages – picked a name.

When he arrived he took a quick look at the furnace, then declared that we needed a new one. Was his word a tactic or truth? Did we really need a new furnace or did he only want our money? I decided his word was not the truth and called another repairman. In a matter of hours he made the repair – charged a reasonable fee, and was on his way. Three years later the furnace was doing just fine.

This morning we have three snapshots before us. One from Daniel of the Ancient One on a fiery throne, a hundred million people gathered before him, serving him, waiting upon him. Then one like a human being came to him and to him was given dominion and glory and kingship that all peoples and nations and languages should serve him.

The second snapshot is a greeting from the one who is and who was and who is to come – the Ancient One – the Lord and from the seven spirits who are before him and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

And the third snapshot is of another royal court – Pilate, representative of Caesar, is lord here. And he questions Jesus.

The contrast between the first two snapshots and the third could not be greater. Jesus who has all authority on heaven and on earth is on trial before some petty ruler. And what does Jesus say, “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”

Truth. That is what I want from the repairmen who come into my house, from the waitress who recommends an entrée, from the one who will be my president. Truth.

So what is the truth about Jesus, the truth about God? Is it a heavenly glory glimpsed by Daniel, revealed to John? Or is it the one who lets Pilate sit in judgement of him? Is a Lord who kneels and washes his disciples’ feet revealing the truth about God or is this only a tactic designed to change disciples the way Jesus wants them changed? Is the cross a tactic, a way to get the job done so that we can all get on with heavenly glory, or is the cross the very way God reigns as king over us?

Jesus said, “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”

You all know what an undercover agent is – a policeman who pretends to be a drug dealer – a spy posing as an ordinary citizen – everything she does is about finding out the truth yet everything she does is a deception. What do you think – is Jesus God gone undercover? Is Jesus a king pretending to be what he is not?

Jesus said, “When you fed one of the least of my sisters and brothers, you fed me. When you clothed her, you clothed me. When you visited her in prison, you visited me.” Has Jesus gone undercover in the homeless family, seeking a shelter? Has Jesus gone undercover in disguising himself as a mother, battered by her spouse – seeking shelter at Genesis house?

Jesus said, “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”

Jesus is not a deceiver. God is not playing tricks. God is not pretending to be weak and vulnerable in order to spring some trap on us when our defenses are down. Jesus came to testify to the truth – Jesus said, “I am the truth.”

Sometimes we see where a person's heart really is. In the heat of battle when someone must crawl through enemy fire to save the others – this is when hearts are revealed. When a mayor is charged with crimes, he finds out where hearts are – who really is friend, supporter – who abandons him. I remember when Sue was battling cancer before we moved here how some friends just disappeared – how some other people made it clear that they were standing with us in that difficult time.

Jesus is God going where God's heart is. Not setting up some heavenly throne room here on earth - gold and jewels and wealth that dazzles - but taking on our flesh and blood - the very same flesh and blood that you are. God's heart is here with you.

God's heart is not in the great cathedrals. God's heart is not in wielding power and wealth here on earth. God's heart is not creating great gatherings to impress the media.

God's heart is in lifting the fallen, forgiving those who have sinned, giving a sip of water to the thirsting.

God's heart is Jesus with you. His body given for you, his blood shed for you - God's love.

Jesus is not a tactic God uses to save sinners. Jesus is the truth about God.

God loves you so much that Jesus endured pain and rejection and ridicule for you. Jesus died to make sure that you would be with him forever. That's the truth.

God hopes you will live that truth, never doubting God's love for you. God hopes you will live that truth helping all the little ones. Amen.