

*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.'*

Bullies. I do not think I ever heard that word in a prayer before but Wednesday evening at the Thanksgiving Eve worship as we were led in the prayers prepared by 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders a number of the petitions were concerned with bullies. We prayed that the ones that are picked on by bullies would be helped by God and we prayed that bullies would change and no longer be bullies. I do not remember ever praying about bullies before.

Bullies. We could pray about bullies every week. Bullies in Iraq, blowing up their enemies with bombs, bullies in industry seeking their wealth at the expense of the little people, bullies in families that shout and hit and sexually abuse those that are weaker, bullies in churches that use their position of power to always get their way. 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders wanted us to pray about bullies knowing what a complicated thing it is to deal with a bully.

Today in the gospel reading today Jesus is face to face with a bully. Now do not know if Pilate has ever been described with the word bully before but that is what he is. Like a bully that is bigger and stronger and mean Pilate confronts Jesus. Pilate was the ruler of the strongest nation on earth - Pilate held Jesus life in his hands. But Jesus was not afraid.

“Are you the king of the Jews?” Pilate taunted Jesus. Pilate knew Jesus was not – Rome had installed puppet kings over the Jewish people – Herods, Phillip, others – puppet kings whose only power came from their Roman lords. But Jesus stood tall – not answering Pilate’s mocking question but asking a question of his own, “Do you ask this on your own or did others tell you about me?”

Pilate responded, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”

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.”

All the kingdoms of this world are maintained through force. The way you deal with a bully is by bullying the bully. Find someone bigger or stronger to beat up the bully but Jesus says that is not his way. His kingdom is not from the world – his power is not like the power this world knows. Pilate will bully Jesus – sentence him to death and Jesus will not resist – not because Jesus is weak and Pilate stronger – in another place Jesus says God could send a thousand angels to fight for Jesus if that was God’s way but it is not.

Pilate asked Jesus, “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 think of how truth is being defined in Iraq these days – the same way truth is defined in the halls of a school. I cause you so much pain that you give up and do what I want. I use my power to hurt you and you lose heart and I rule. Every king from the beginning of time has lived by this rule – and every bully too. But Jesus does not live by this rule. For Jesus knows a greater truth.

Shall this world be ruled by the sword or by the love of God? The mark of Jesus’ followers will not be that they carry the most deadly swords but that they love one another. That day when Pilate was done with Jesus the truth was that the sword had won – Jesus was beaten with a whip while Pilate was entertained by his pain - Jesus was dying on the cross and Pilate was feasting in his palace. By nightfall Jesus’ body would rest on a slab of stone sealed in a tomb while Pilate would rest his head on a soft pillow as he slept. On that day it was clear that to follow Jesus’ way was foolish – Pilate was lord over all.

But Jesus trusted in a greater truth, that the last word would not be spoken by the violence of men but by the love of the Father. Pilate would have his day the way terrorists had September 11, 2001. But when Easter came Jesus truth would be raised eternal – the love of God greater than all.

“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,” said Jesus.

Sometimes I imagine what the world would be like if we just slaughtered all our enemies. Kill everyone this is against us. What a tempting thought that is - Jesus calling down his angels and putting Pilate and every one of the religious leaders on the cross. But this was never Jesus' truth. Jesus was beaten by the bully trusting that God would yet win the victory.

Dare we believe in that victory more than we believe in beating the bully at his game? Could God give us as much courage and hope and faith as he gave Jesus? Jesus bet his life that God would.