

- 1 Stricken, smitten, and afflicted,
See Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ, by man rejected;
Yes, my soul, 'tis He, 'tis He!
'Tis the long-expected Prophet,
David's Son, yet David's Lord;
Proofs I see sufficient of it:
'Tis the true and faithful Word.
- 2 Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would intervene to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that justice gave.
- 3 Ye who think of sin but lightly
Nor suppose the evil great
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the sacrifice appointed,
See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed,
Son of Man and Son of God.
- 4 Here we have a firm foundation,
Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ, the Rock of our salvation,
Is the name of which we boast;
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded,
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded
Who on Him their hope have built.

Text: Thomas Kelly, 1769–1855, alt.

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Opening Responsory

Jesus Christ, You are the Light of the World

Sung by Cantors

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Cantor: Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world,
The light no darkness can overcome.
Stay with us now, for it is evening,
And the day is almost over.
Let your light scatter the darkness,
And shine within your people

Evening Hymn

Joyous Light

All Sing

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1.) Joy-ous light of heav'n-ly glo - ry, lov - ing
2.) In the stars that grace the dark - ness, in the
3.) You who made the heav-en's splen - dor, ev - 'ry

4
glow of God's own face, you who sing cre - a - tion's
blaz - ing sun of dawn, in the light of peace and
7 danc - ing star of night, make us shine with gen - tle

10
sto - ry, shine on ev - 'ry land and race. Now as
wis - dom, we can hear your qui - et song. Love that
13 jus - tice, let us each re - flect your light. Might - y

16
eve - ing falls a - round us, we shall raise our songs to
fills the night with won - der, love that warms the wea - ry
19 God of all cre - a - tion, gen - tle Christ who lights our

22
you. God of day - break, God of shad - ows, come and
soul, love that bursts all chains a - sun - der, set us
25 way, lov - ing Spir - it of sal - va - tion, lead us

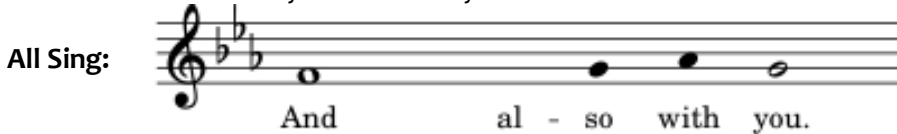
28
light our hearts a - new.
free and make us whole.
on to end - less day.

Evening Thanksgiving

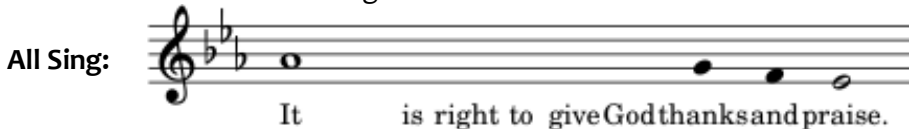
Sung Responsively

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Cantor: May God be with you all.



Cantor: Let us sing our thanks to God.



Cantor: Blessed are you, Creator of the universe,
From old you have led your people by night and day.
May the light of your Christ make our darkness bright,
For your Word and your presence are the light of our pathways,
And you are the light and life of all creation. Amen.

Psalmody

Psalm 14 (spoken)

P Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."

C They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.

P The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God.

C They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one.

P Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the LORD?

C There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous.

P You would confound the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.

C O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

Glory to the Father be,
And to Christ, eternally.
Glory to the Spirit raise.
Join all nature in her praise:
From creation's ancient shore
Unto life forevermore.

Stand

Reading

Luke 23:1–24

¹Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” ³And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “**You have said so.**” ⁴Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” ⁵But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

⁶When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. ¹⁰The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹²And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

¹³Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. ¹⁶I will therefore punish and release him.”

¹⁸But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”—¹⁹a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” ²²A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” ²³But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. ²⁴So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.

Theme Hymn

(sung to LSB 449 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded)

The voices of the Passion,
Those words from ancient days—
What message do they fashion
As on your cross I gaze?
In words that once were spoken,
In speech now overheard,
Grant me, O Lord, this token:
To hear your living Word!

Sermonic Introduction

P *"The good that I would I do not," St. Paul once wrote, "and the evil I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19). What the apostle was describing is a common problem, one that seems as though it should be very simple to deal with. It has to do with the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. and in most cases that should be simple enough. The Ten Commandments are relatively clear as a starting point, so that in most instances the good thing to do--the RIGHT thing to do--is quite evident.*

But as well as we may KNOW what is the right thing to do, it is often much harder actually to DO it. We may blame our failure (quite correctly) on the fact that situations are not always as simple as they seem. The RIGHT thing to do (if one can determine it) is not always the EASIEST thing to do, or the most comfortable. In fact, it may be quite painful. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself is an example of that: Doing what was right--what needed to be done--cost him his life, at last.

Pontius Pilate may serve as another example of the high price that righteousness demands, a price he was not quite willing to pay. From the Scriptures we know that while our Lord's trial was going on, Pilate received word from his wife, asking him to "have nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered much over him today in a dream." That's all we know about the incident. We do not know, for example whether Pilate and his wife pursued the subject when he returned to his quarters later that day ... but we can imagine what we might have overheard.

Conversations by the Cross

Pilate and His Wife

Procula Oh, you're home.

Pilate (*barely acknowledging*) Um humm.

Procula Did you receive my message today?

Pilate (*rather flatly*) Yes, it was delivered.

Procula And?

Pilate And what?

Procula And did you release him, as I had begged you?

Pilate (*resigned*) I'm sure you already know the answer to that.

Procula Yes, I do. (*almost pleading*) I *begged* you to have nothing to do with that righteous man.

Pilate (*disgusted*) I know. I got your message. Women's dreams!

Procula It was a terrible dream. It upset me greatly.

Pilate (*upset*) It upsets *me* greatly that because of a dream, of all things, you would interfere with the doing of justice!

Procula Perhaps we had better not speak of justice, my husband.

Pilate What do you mean by that?

Procula You condemned him to death, didn't you?

Pilate Yes, I did.

Procula But *why*? What had he done to deserve *death*? He was a *righteous* man.

Pilate Of course he was. There was never any question about that. The charges were trumped up; that was obvious. The whole thing was some kind of religious squabble. I never did find out what it was all about. "We have a law," their council said, "and according to our law he ought to die."

Procula We have a law, too, don't we? And according to our law he ought *not* to have died.

Pilate Yes, and that's exactly what I told them: *(as if rendering judgment)* "I find in this man nothing deserving death."

Procula But then you let him be crucified! Why? *(pause, then becoming specific)* For what crime was he put to death?

Pilate Well ... treason was the official charge.

Procula *(exploding)* Treason?!? Where did you ever get an accusation like that? He was a righteous man.

Pilate *(calmly, officially)* They said he claimed to be a king.

Procula And was he?

Pilate He claimed to be.

Procula Did he really, himself?

Pilate *(brightening)* Yes, in fact, he did.

Procula And did he threaten to overthrow all of Rome? Or even to run you and your legions out of Judea, Pilate?

Pilate *(darkly)* Not exactly, no. He said something to the effect that his kingdom was "not of this world" ... and that his followers had no intention of fighting for it, wherever it is.

Procula That was the terrible treason against Rome?

Pilate *(frustrated)* Woman, you know how these Jews are about their religious beliefs.

Procula *(still pressing)* Was he truly guilty of treason?

Pilate *(matter-of-factly)* That is what the inscription of accusation said over his head on the cross.

Procula It said, "Treason"? "This man is guilty of treason"???

Pilate Not exactly. It said, "This is the King of the Jews."

Procula What is that, some kind of joke?

Pilate (*brightly*) Not at all. In fact, the chief priests and the leaders tried to get me to change the sign. They wanted to say, "He *claimed* to be the King of the Jews." But I wouldn't budge.

Procula (*sarcastically*) You wouldn't budge.

Pilate "What I have written stays written," I told them.

Procula You wouldn't budge! You let them maneuver you, the Roman governor, into condemning an innocent man to death--a righteous man, a man you yourself said was innocent--and then, when that injustice was complete, you suddenly got firm in your resolve, and wouldn't change the words on a stupid signboard.

Pilate (*angry*) What I have written stays written!

Procula And was he the King of the Jews, as you wrote?

Pilate (*loudly*) Yes!!!

Procula (*softly*) Do you really believe that, Pontius?

Pilate (*loudly*) Yes!!! What I have written stays written!

Procula (*pause, then softly*) For if it were not true, then his blood would be on your hands, wouldn't it?

Pilate (*brightly, as if playing a trump card*) No! As a matter of fact, that is not a problem at all, for I *washed* my hands of the whole matter.

Procula You what?

Pilate Washed my *hands*. When they kept shouting for his crucifixion even after I had rendered my considered judgment, I called for a bowl of water and I washed my hands. "I am innocent of the blood of this just man," I told them. Yes, I washed my hands of the whole matter.

Procula (*in disbelief*) Oh, did you really, Pilate? You rendered a judgment that an innocent man deserves to die. And that is not washing your hands of the matter.

Pilate (*insistent*) Yes, it is. They said, "His blood be on *us* and on *our* children."

Procula Who said that?

Pilate The crowds, all of them. "His blood be on *us* and on *our* children."

Procula And is it?

Pilate Is it what?

Procula Is it the *truth*? Is his blood not on them ... and on their children ... just because you said so?

Pilate Yes, guilt is absolved because I say so. That is exactly how it happens in my court: If I judge a man guilty, he is so; and if I judge a man innocent, then he is without guilt.

Procula Is he really without *guilt*?

Pilate Of course he is.

Procula Or is he simply relieved for the moment of his *punishment*?

Pilate What are you saying?

Procula That I'm not sure you can get rid of guilt just by saying so.

Pilate (*trying to change subjects*) I don't know why you insist on trying to hang this petty thing on me.

Procula Because you are a *judge*, Pontius, and *justice is expected of you*.

Pilate Well, *he* was the *defendant*. And he did *not* defend himself. When I questioned him at length, he remained silent.

Procula And did that make him guilty? After you had declared him innocent?

Pilate (*getting tired*) I tried to set him free.

Procula You didn't try.

Pilate (*insistent*) I *did* try! When I found out he was a Galilean, I even sent him to Herod for judgment.

Procula (*incredulous*) Do you call that justice? Sending him to that petty pretender? I never thought I'd see the day.

Pilate I never thought I'd see it either. But I will have to admit that Herod did conduct a fair and impartial hearing. And although it put the problem back in my hands, he actually deferred to my jurisdiction. Most polite and proper throughout, even cordial. Perhaps we have misjudged the man, my dear.

Procula He's not the only one you have misjudged this day, my dear.

Pilate You needn't be sarcastic.

Procula (*with emphasis*) But he was *innocent*, Pilate! Even Herod agreed.

Pilate Innocent or guilty, he could have ruined everything for me.

Procula (*somewhat sarcastically*) Oh, is *that* why you conduct your court, Pontius? To benefit you?

Pilate (*emphatically*) To benefit Rome.

Procula (*lightly*) Rome could have weathered this little storm, I suspect. It has dealt with worse.

Pilate (*trumping again*) And the way it does so is through people like me. It is my job to keep the peace in Judea.

Procula And do you keep the peace by sacrificing the righteous?

Pilate There was no easy decision that could be rendered in this matter; don't you understand that?

Procula No, I don't.

Pilate (*as if being very patient*) There are times in life where there are no good decisions possible, only choices among bad ones. And this was one of those times.

Procula (*almost as if she hadn't heard*) What would have been so bad about releasing him?

Pilate (*impatiently*) Don't you see, woman? There was no way out of this thing. If I had released him, there might well have been another riot; you know how volatile these fanatics are. They had threatened to inform *Caesar*.

Procula And is that worth the life of a righteous man?

Pilate Of course it is! After all the things that have been happening in Judea, another incident could cost me my post, my career. Tiberius is not too fond of me to begin with. At the very worst, given the climate of the times, my *life* could have been at stake.

Procula Aren't you being overly dramatic about the whole thing?

Pilate Aren't you being overly dramatic about the whole thing? He was just one person, one little insignificant person ...

Procula (*insistent*) One righteous person!

Pilate (*exploding*) It was his life or mine!

(*If the sound effect is possible a KNOCK AT THE DOOR occurs here, and Pilate says, "Come in." If not, simply continue thus:*)

Messenger I am sorry to disturb you, excellency.

Pilate (*disturbed anyway, and tired*) Yes, what is it?

Messenger (*crisp and efficient*) You may recall, sir, that Joseph of Arimathea had requested the body of the criminal Jesus, once the crucifixion was complete.

Pilate Yes, I told him I would let him know. Why are you disturbing me here?

Messenger (*almost apologetically*) Well, he has now been joined in his request by a man named Nicodemus. (*pause, and then to explain*) A member of the Sanhedrin, sir.

Pilate Yes, I know who he is. I thought they had all voted that this Jesus was an outcast.

Messenger They are waiting for your decision, sir ... both of them.

Pilate (*reflectively, to himself*) Frankly, I'm surprised that a man like Nicodemus would want to be identified with this Jesus, especially now that (*sarcastically*) "the King of the Jews" is hanging on a cross. I never would have expected it of him.

Messenger Do you have a reply, sir?

Pilate Uh, yes. Tell them I'll be there presently.

Messenger Yes, sir.

Pilate (*pause, as if waiting for the messenger to leave, then reflecting*) Nicodemus. Who would have thought? Taking a stand like that at a time like this could be political suicide. You would think he would be more prudent. I'll never understand what makes people do things like that.

Procula (*just as reflectively*) Yes, I'm sure you never will.

Pilate What do you mean by that?

Procula Perhaps, my dear, this member of the Jewish Council is concerned about something that seems to have eluded your courtroom in this case--the thing that has been bothering me all day.

Pilate What are you talking about, woman, another one of your dreams?

Procula No, Pilate. Unless the truth ... is only a dream.

Sermonic Conclusion

P *What IS truth? It is probably not fair to make Pilate ask that question twice in one day. Perhaps we have put him through too much of a grilling already. Although ... perhaps he deserves it.*

Among other things, according to the Bible, TRUTH is something you can rely on, something that remains firm and immovable, solid and unchanging--in contrast to things that cannot be trusted, because they shift and slip and slide. Pontius Pilate KNEW that--that this man Jesus was innocent--but Pilate did not DO what that truth required ... because it might have been uncomfortable, even painful, to do so.

Nicodemus, on the other hand ... no, let's not stop with Nicodemus as our example, but go all the way to Jesus himself. Jesus KNEW the truth. He knew the truth of our sinfulness, our helplessness to redeem ourselves, the truth that "the good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do." And Jesus knew it was also true that he had come to redeem the world from its sin ... and that doing so would require that he forfeit his own comfort. "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve," he had said, "and to give his life as a ransom for many."

One would like to say, "So, that makes it easier for US to stand up for what we know is right and to act on that knowledge." One would like to say it, but it may not be true. The truth is that following Jesus is still quite difficult, and often painful. What he suffered for us may not make it any easier ... but it does give us a reason. The forgiveness which this Righteous One offers us--the washing that covers more than just our hands--is not just an idle dream to contemplate, but something that changes attitudes and actions ... no matter what the consequences.

And that is the truth.

Theme Hymn

(sung to LSB 449 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

And purify my soul;
That I may do what pleases,
My conscience, Lord, control.
O true and righteous Savior,
O Witness bold and true,
Make it my sole endeavor
Your will to know and do.

Offering

Stand

Prayers

P On what can we rely, O Lord, except your mercy and your grace?

C We cannot trust ourselves, our own powers or will or the wishes of our hearts, for we are weak and sinful and powerless without your gracious aid.

P Do not enter into judgment with your servants, for in your sight no one shall stand.

C But send your Holy Spirit on us all, we pray, to convict us of our sin and to convince us of your righteousness--righteousness made freely ours through Christ who went the way of bitter, painful death that we might stand and walk righteous before you.

P Show us, then, the way to walk ... the thing to do ... the word to speak ... the example to follow, and to be.

C And when your way for us is hard, O God, make us firm in our resolve, and true in our response, faithful in the doing of your loving will.

P Through him who kept your will, unbent and true, for us; in whose strong name we pray: C Our Father ...

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

Sit

Final Blessing

Sung Responsively

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Cantor: Let us bless our God:
Praise and thanks to you.
May God, Creator, bless us and keep us,
May Christ be ever light for our lives,
May the Spirit of Love be our guide and path for all of our days.



Closing Hymn

428 Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow

1 Cross of Jesus, cross of sorrow,
Where the blood of Christ was shed,
Perfect man on thee did suffer,
Perfect God on thee has bled!

- 2 Here the King of all the ages,
 Throned in light ere worlds could be,
 Robed in mortal flesh is dying,
 Crucified by sin for me.
- 3 O mysterious condescending!
 O abandonment sublime!
 Very God Himself is bearing
 All the sufferings of time!
- 4 Cross of Jesus, cross of sorrow,
 Where the blood of Christ was shed,
 Perfect man on thee did suffer,
 Perfect God on thee has bled!

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