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People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

When I was in kindergarten a movie was made called, “12 Angry Men!” “12 Angry Men”, is all about a murder trial. The movie begins just after closing arguments. The whole movie – except for 3 minutes – all takes place in the jury room. There’s a moment on the steps outside the courthouse and two times in the washroom – but that’s it. The whole movie is in the jury room. Except for two jurors swapping names at the very end – there are no names in the whole movie. The defendant is “the boy” And the witnesses are “the old man” and “the lady across the street.” It’s all about *reasonable doubt*! Do you understand that concept – *reasonable doubt*? It’s not beyond *all* doubt – it’s beyond a *reasonable* doubt. The boy is accused of murdering – stabbing his father to death. Did he do it? The first time the jury votes it’s 11 guilty – 1 vote for innocent. Juror #8 has doubts – and the verdict must be unanimous. Consider the evidence! The murder weapon is a rare knife – or is it? Juror #8 pulls an identical one out of his pocket. There’s an eye witness! You can’t argue with that – or can you? She didn’t have her glasses on! Henry Fonda – with his *awe shucks* sort of stammer and stutter – his arguments made powerful by the truth! There’s Lee J. Cobb and George C. Scott – James Gandolfini/Tony Soprano – Jack Lemmon – even Norm – from *Cheers* – George Wendt the jury foreman – a high school football coach. It’s a powerful story – where in the end the innocent goes free! I like that! The passionate arguments of 12 angry men and in the end – justice triumphs! That’s how it’s supposed to work out – convict the guilty – and set the innocent free! That’s how it’s supposed to be!

Today – the last Sunday of the Church Year – we see the Son of Man – the Son of *God* – on trial before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. Today we see the innocent condemned – so that the guilty – the forgiven – that would be you and I go free! Today we see:

### **CHRIST IS THE KING!**

- 1. JESUS’ KINGDOM IS HEAVENLY**
- 2. JESUS’ WORD IS TRUTH!**

It might seem strange at first – to have a Gospel reading that sounds like Lent. It sounds like something you would read on a Wednesday night in the Spring – a week or two before Holy Week. Something you might read on Good Friday – Jesus tried and condemned by Pontius Pilate. You can close your eyes and see your Sunday School lesson: Jesus standing there – with the purple robe wrapped around his torn and bloodied shoulders – the crown of thorns pushed down on his tender forehead – his hands tied in front of him. Pilate – between the crowd and Jesus. Pilate saying to the people, “**Behold, the man!**” And the people scream back, “**Crucify him! Crucify him!**” And Pilate says, “**Why? What crime has he committed?**” And they cry all the more, “**Crucify him! Crucify him!**” And so Pilate makes a great show of washing his hands of the whole business. “**I am innocent of this man’s blood!**” But he isn’t! And we aren’t innocent either! We are guilty! We are to blame! Jesus’ blood is **on us and on our children** and grandchildren!

As we catch up in spirit with the Lord Jesus – it is first light of Good Friday morning. **To avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace** (ever the sticklers about the ceremonial law – and about the man made traditions of the elders – they didn’t enter the home of a Gentile. Heaven only knew what

“unclean” stuff might be lying around!) **they wanted to be able to eat the Passover** – not the Passover supper – Jesus had already celebrated with his disciples Maundy Thursday – but any number of special meals – eaten during the 7 day celebration that encompassed all of Passover. So Pilate came out to hear them. **“What charges are you bringing against this man?” “If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.”** Don’t worry about what Jesus has done – just rubberstamp our desire and decision to put him to death. **Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” “But we have no right to execute anyone,” the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.** Jesus would be crucified. His hands and feet would be pierced by nails. Jesus would die on a tree. Jesus would not be stoned to death for blasphemy. He would sacrifice his innocent life on the altar of the cross – just as Isaiah foretold – just as Jesus himself had said. **Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”** Jesus never ever did anything wrong! That’s something we say all the time – the holy innocent Son of God. But do you appreciate what that means? Jesus never ever did anything wrong! Jesus never had a sinful thought! Jesus never ever said anything that was hurtful or inappropriate or rude or wrong. Jesus never ever did anything to break any commandment. Then---Jesus was always busy – thinking what was God-pleasing – always saying what was encouraging and helpful. Jesus was always busy accomplishing his Heavenly Father’s will. Jesus didn’t just *try* really hard to be good – Jesus was always perfect – *always!*

**Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”** Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is in control of absolutely everything! Every drop of rain that falls on your windshield – is under Jesus’ control. Every leaf that falls from a tree and catches in the shrub in the flowerbed in front of your house – is under Jesus’ control. Every goose that is flying overhead – every flake of snow that will fall on your driveway – every wisp of fog that is in your headlight when you drive home from Aunt Kathleen and Uncle Marty’s house on Thanksgiving and every little needle that will fall from your Christmas tree and catch in your carpet is under Jesus’ control. Every hair on your head that you shampoo and condition and comb is counted by your Lord Jesus. *Having said that* – it’s important to remember the most important kingdom is not this earthly kingdom. The most important kingdom is Jesus’ Heavenly kingdom! What matters *most* is not a matter of armies and taxes and health care and stimulus! What matters *most* is not Thanksgiving turkey and stuffing and cranberries and sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie. What matters *most* is the kingdom of God. What matters *most* is that we are wretched sinners that Jesus died and rose again to buy back from sin and guilt – blame and shame. What matters is building up the kingdom of God – living our faith and sharing our faith – first with our family – then with our neighbor – our co-worker and the people we bump into – day after day!

**Jesus told Pontius Pilate: “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”** God’s Word is the truth. This world doesn’t want to hear the truth – but that doesn’t change the fact that God’s Word is the truth. All over Watertown and Madison there are bumper stickers made up from the symbols of the world’s religions. These symbols are used to spell out words like tolerance and peace. The truth is – there is forgiveness in Jesus and in Him alone. People who worship Allah – and in his name blow themselves up – along with innocent women and children – expecting an eternity of pretty girls serving them wine and fruit – will know only the horrors of the flaming lake of fire. Those who worship Buddha and are so gentle they would not squish a bug – and are so sincere they would set themselves on fire in the name of world peace – will know the suffering of a worm squashed but not dead forever! Those who live proud of their homosexuality – with their bumper stickers and rainbow flags and their gay pride parades and their gay marriages are trying to deny the truth that Sodom and Gomorrah were scorched from the earth – not because of their lack of hospitality and lack of manners – but because of their blatant arrogant homosexuality. People who boast of their gay pride – deny the truth of God’s Word – where it says of their sinful lifestyle – they have **“exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. They have committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the penalty for their perversion.”** Romans 1:26f This is God’s Word. God’s Word says all have sinned and fall fatally short of what

God requires. It is not for us to hate people who commit sins. It is for us to call one another to repentance. It is for us to share the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen! It is for us to show everyone **the Way, the Truth and the Life!** Those who are *humanists* – thinking we are the captain of our destiny – the master of our soul – smart enough and clever enough and strong enough to solve all of our problems – apart from any Maker or Creator or Preserver or Redeemer – will learn to their everlasting shame and pain that God is the potter and we are the clay. Those who mock and ridicule and literally blaspheme the name of the Lord Jesus – will join all mankind when Jesus returns **in power and great glory with all his holy angels with him.** Then every knee – *every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*

We like to watch TV shows and movies about trials – lawyers arguing to convict the guilty and to set the innocent free! We were watching a lawyer show just the other day – a final appeal for a man sentenced to be put to death for attacking and then murdering his estranged girlfriend! There was lots of circumstantial evidence. That's not weak or poor evidence. Circumstantial evidence means there's all kinds of evidence – circumstances – that all point to the guilt of the defendant. There was lots of circumstantial evidence. There was a witness who testified that he had seen the defendant – go into the house of the victim – around the time of the murders. And yet – that witness was an alcoholic – habitually drunk by 9 at night – who thought it was 10:30 at night – because Johnny Carson was on. When – in fact – the night of the murder – Johnny Carson had a prime time special! The nightgown the victim was wearing when she was murdered – where was it? It was carefully folded and buried with the victim – the Jewish victim – because it was there custom. When a person dies as the result of a violent crime – they are buried with the clothes they were wearing when they were attacked – so God will see them and understand how they died – and have *compassion* – have mercy on them. When we die – we know our Heavenly Father will treat us with compassion – with mercy and forgiveness for we are clothed with the robe of righteousness that Jesus purchased for us with his innocent blood shed on the cross to forgive us. Jesus will be merciful to us – because he loves us with an unconditional forgiving love that will never fail or change. We are children of God by grace through faith for Jesus' sake. And that means we will be dressed in robes of righteousness forever. That's the truth! Amen!

*To God alone all glory!*



*Rsv. Anthony E. Schuttz*