

"I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves"
Matthew 27:24

The man who uttered these words was not at the foot of the cross. Yet like an echo he and his words were there... This was Pontius Pilate's official estimate of himself. What his unofficial and private estimate of himself was we do not know. As with many people, their public proclamations may differ from their private feelings. The Christian community has its conclusion, ^{about Pilate} written into the Apostles Creed: "crucified under Pontius Pilate". And the judgement of his history refuses to exonerate this Roman who is remembered more than any other procurator, remembered for what he permitted to happen to a certain Jew named Jesus.

1. Pilate had a chance to champion Jesus, to defend him. But he did what many of us would have done in his position. When heavy risk is involved, we are apt to practice the ancient art of evasion, especially if the risk is politically and socially conditioned. He said in effect: "This is your affair, take care of it yourselves". And men have always been quick to destroy that which they deem unworthy of defending.

Jesus was a burning issue when he stood before Pilate ...to hot to handle with safety. Pilate was up against it. He couldn't find any guilt in Jesus....but knew that if he

released Jesus, then he would have a civil disturbance on hand. He didn't have the personal courage to act on his own findings about the innocence or guilt of Jesus. So he sidestepped responsibility for the execution he was about to announce...by saying that he was not to be held guilty for what was about to happen: "It is your affair". Pilate could wash his hands in public....but what could he do with his heart in private?

Perhaps, during this Lent, we ought to ask ourselves a practical and disturbing question: "What am I doing with Jesus in the privacy of my own life and on the corners where I work and play"? The evasion of making decisions about him amount to making decisions against him. Spiritual law^s goes right on working whether we admit to them or not. To evade responsibility never erases the responsibility itself. For you to hand Jesus, and decisions about him, over to someone else as though he were none of your affair is to mishandle God's treasure. What are you doing with Christ now? Every person has to answer.

2. One of life's most difficult times is when stress is placed upon one's personal courage. Nothing is more tempting than to find excuses, however neatly phrased they are.

Pressure was put on Pilate. He responded to a real situation. What was he going to do with Jesus? He chose to defend himself, he resorted to the alibi. Alibis are

not hard to come by. We too have learned the convenient alibi -- lulling ourselves to a false state of innocence ³ regarding the fate of Christ in our day. We salve our consciences with good sounding phrases and go on living as if he weren't living.

"I am Innocent" is a first class defense mechanism. People have long resorted to it. Adam and Eve in the garden used it when God confronted them with the apple core. Adam said it was Eve's fault, Eve said it was the serpent's fault. And men and women ever since have been passing the buck.

Alibis appear early in life, stay late and usually do a rather brisk business.

Jesus told a parable involving man's readiness to find excuses. A man invited a lot of guests to an banquet. His servant was sent out to tell them that everything was ready and that they should come. One fellow said: "I've purchased a farm and I've got to go look it over". Another said: "I have bought five yoke of oxen and I have to go examine them", And a third one said, with what was either the best or poorest alibi, "I have just married and I cannot come".

So they all turned down the dinner invitation, just as we often turn down the matchless invitation of Christ to participate in the abundant life.

Pilate asked the crowd: "What shall I do with Jesus who

is called Christ". His problem was not what the crowd would do, but what Pilate himself would do. It is never enough to enquire what somebody else thinks about Jesus, for each one must decide for himself. The one who remains non-committal takes sides. There is no neutrality in deciding what you are going to do with Christ.

Pilate, of course, is not the only one who compromised himself to self-interest and pressure. We do too, for with embarrassing regularity we wash our hands of him as tho the real responsibility of what happens to Christ belongs to someone else.

Don't most of us accept the Christ as a popular religious fashion, rather than a power which aims at altering the design of our lives? Don't we often accept him for what he can give us rather than for what we can give him and those whom we are called to serve? But, hopefully, the inner debate goes on, and Christ is still contending for triumph in your life. For Paul, the debate climaxed on the Damascus road. To a measure, what happened to Paul, happens to every one who accepts accountability for what happens to Christ. Something happens to a person, and something happens to the world thru which a person moves, when he takes seriously the business of deciding for Christ in day-by-day situations. It may seem quite unimportant to decide for Christ in the little things, yet that can be the most far-reaching

series of redemptive decisions you will ever make. No one can turn lightly away saying: "Whether or not God's purpose and will is carried out in this world is not my affair" for God has placed in each of us the potential power, activated by faith, which will change the world.

Well, Christ is your affair and my affair. We can't wash our hands of him. As a Christian, as the community of God's people, Christ is our business. He is the biggest business we have. For it is the will of God that we not only hear his word, but do it. No other venture can ask more of us and cause us to live to the fullest. No other venture rewards with such dividends.

3. Now, if we choose to invest our lives in Christ, in the things of God, what will be the consequences? I don't know all the consequences. One of them will be pride - real pride in the the community of Christ's people. But the pride will not be in the size of our stores, the popularity of our ^{theater,} ~~discos~~, the costliness of our recreation, the luxuriousness of our churches, or the record of our athletic teams. Rather, our pride will be in the honesty of the folk who operate the stores, the caliber of the productions shown in our theater, the friendship of the people in the parks, the brotherhood in and out of the churches, and in the team spirit which accepts defeat gracefully.

But in the center of legitimate pride there is another

consequence - the cross. Self-sacrifice is essential to ⁽⁶⁾ self-fulfillment. Christians must invest heavily of their time, their talent, and their possessions if we are to uphold and enhance the priceless meaning of the man on the cross in a day of cheap attitudes.

As the food preserved is worth the price of the salt, as the heat produced is worth the burning of the fuel, as the bread is worth the yeast in transforming the loaf, so Christ is worth all the sacrifice we can make. God's way grows and expands on human expendables....the life given for Christ is saved.

Christianity is degenerating when its adherents prefer a steak in the stomach to a kingdom concern[~] in the heart; whenever Christians piously partake of the Lord's Supper and ignore the empty plates of the poor; whenever Christ's followers put him in the show windows and place the devil behind the counter; whenever believers expect one moment in baptism to suffice for a life time of work, worship, and daily devotion.

The popular mind demands that a principle be demonstrated in some practical way before accepting it. It is your responsibility - not someone else's - to reveal to the rest of this community in seeable and practical ways how sensible it is to practice the principles of our faith. Don't

think that anyone else is-going to do it - it is your (7)
responsibility. What happens to Christ is your affair.

"I am innocent of the blood of this just man, see to
it yourselves", alibied Pilate. "It is none of our affair"
so we are likely to alibi our response to Jesus Christ
today.

We have come up with a bunch of reasons not to serve
Christ. . . but now, at last, we know that the time has
come for us to lay all that aside, and to lift up for all
the world to see, the life of commitment and sacrifice.

For surely, God, with all his patience, has had enough of
our pretenses.

Come now,..don't wait any longer

Be responsible for what happens to Christ in our com-
munity. Do that and he shall truly live in our midst....
and maybe more important . . you, too, will live.