

Today we begin a series of stories where we look at key players in the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The series is entitled The Drama of Lent. We will look at some characters of the drama that will be well known to you, some you have heard of, and some where you probably have very little knowledge. None of them have a lot written about them, but all of them played an important part in the Drama.

This morning we start with two players of the drama who are probably familiar to you, Pilate and Herod. But who are they? Why were they involved? What can they teach us during this time of Lent? Let us pray and then read our passage from Luke 23:1-12

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. ² They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." ³ Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." ⁵ But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place." ⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. ⁹ He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Two government officials of great power and ill-repute: Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor of Judea, and Herod Antipas the 'King' over Galilee. First, who exactly is Pontius Pilate? Pilate had political connections. As governor he had a cavalry regiment under his command (perhaps some five thousand men in all) for the maintenance of order.

Pilate often caused unrest. When Pilate sent a military unit to garrison duty in Jerusalem, the population took offense because within the Holy City the army used standards that displayed images of the emperor, contrary to Jewish law. According to Josephus this was a deliberate offense. At first Pilate refused to withdraw these symbols of the imperial majesty. After a display of force, however, he yielded to the pressure of a popular demonstration.

Christ's trial before Pilate had nearly all the features of a normal trial by the investigation of the governor. The prosecution was initiated and conducted by independent prosecutors — the high priest and his colleagues. The governor sat on his judgment seat and gave direct sentence of punishment.

The charge was formulated not as the infringement of a particular law but as an indictment of actions that the governor was required to evaluate. Pilate's repeated questioning of Jesus about His alleged kingship was in a form regularly employed to determine the guilt of a prisoner who refused to plead.

In all four Gospels, Pilate carefully questioned the prisoner about His political role. But he eventually yielded to the strong pressure of the Jewish leaders to convict Jesus. The Jews' explicit threat against Pilate, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend" hints at an investigation on a charge of — neglect of the security of the state.

Such investigations were frequent in Rome in this period; Pilate escaped one for the trial of Christ, but a later action caused him to be sent to Rome for imperial interrogation. Pilate realized he was in trouble and tried to turn this problem over to Herod.

So, who is Herod? Herod's reign was marked with splendor. Reference may be made first to the cultural developments. Herod introduced Olympic type games in honor of Caesar and constructed theaters, amphitheaters, and arenas. He rebuilt many fortresses in the land and temples in gentile

territories. He built for himself a royal palace in Jerusalem. His greatest achievement in construction was the temple, which began in 20 b.c. and completed in a.d. 63, long after his death. The temple was later destroyed as predicted by Jesus.

In the Bible we first learn of Herod when he killed all the male children of Bethlehem who were two years old and younger hoping to kill a child who prophecy said, would become a king. Herod also ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. Finally, in Acts we are told, *“About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. ² He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. ³ After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.”* So Herod and Pilate were quite the pair. And though they did not like one another, they became friends due to the death of Jesus.

Pilate and Herod had authority and were afraid of authority. The ultimate fear was the authority of Rome, appearing before Caesar. They also feared leaders who could cause people to revolt which would get the attention of Rome which was not good for them. They were to maintain peace. One part of the drama of lent is the recognition of authority.

In our own sense of self we want no one to have authority over us; everyone is king of his or her castle. And most of all, authority of God over us is huge. For many who feel crushed by authority, authority of God is the ultimate problem. Because there is no escaping such authority. It becomes easier to ignore the authority, ridicule the authority, demean the authority. When people denounce Christianity part of it is because they do not want to be held accountable by God, the ultimate authority. They become Pilate and Herod.

The second part of this drama is truth. Jesus has his truth. The Pharisees had their truth. Pilate asks in another Gospel, “What is truth?” It would be a good question for philosophers of that time. To ignore biblical truth as truth is not to be held accountable to the truth of Jesus Christ. Today, many people replay Pilate and Herod, asking, “What is truth?” Everyone has their truth, yours is no better than theirs.

Another part of the drama was that they wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Herod says, Pilate makes the decision. Pilate says to the Pharisees, “His blood is on you, I wash my hands of his blood.” The Pharisees want him out of the way, dead. People today still want Jesus dead. The resurrection is not a truth for it forces one to explore something that has life changing implications. Ignore Jesus; have nothing to do with him. Today, many like Pilate and Herod ignore Jesus.

And finally, the drama includes the pull of the majority. Pilate and Herod gave in to keep peace with the majority. It is still one of our greatest problems. In a culture that crucifies the story of Jesus, shoves it under a pile of religious stories, and puts it in the category of fairy tale, people today turn away because the majority wants them to.

Eventually, all the followers of Jesus had to confront these realities. They argued with these authorities and died for their opposition to power and the majority. That is why they become witnesses which is a Greek word for martyr. Our part of the drama is to choose. Will we side with Pilate or Herod or those who stood against them, even to their death? Even to the death of Jesus?

The drama of Lent. I choose against Pilate and Herod and the majority. My truth is gospel and I’m under the banner of Christ. What about you? What is your side? Amen.