
SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 7, 2019

"A Woman With A Dream" - Grit and Grace Sermon Series

By Jenny Sung



Good Morning! We are in the sermon series called Grit and Grace, focusing on different women in the Bible and what their stories can teach us about God's character and will, and about the women who are gracious, who are tenacious (and thus have grit), obedient and devoted to what God has called them to do- no matter what their place or where their season of life is.

Last week, Pastor Steve preached an amazing sermon on the devotion of a poor widow who put in all she had into the temple offering. This was in the time when Jesus walked the Earth, as we read from the book of Mark chapter 12.

Today, we dive into another gospel, the gospel of Matthew, in the time of Jesus during His last days on Earth. We look into the action of one single woman with one single verse: A total of 38 words that reveals a warning, a revelation of innocence and the truth about the charges against Jesus. She then acts to share this revelation with her husband, who holds in his hands, the life of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Now we know from an eternal perspective that no one held the life of Jesus Christ in their hands- Jesus the Son of God, chose to hold out His own life. He knew of the mission and goal of redeeming us back into the loving relationship with God, our Father, and Jesus held His life out as a sacrifice for us. It was an act of ultimate love for you and for me.

But from a human limited perspective, we see in the verses for today, a precarious decision point for one governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate the Roman governor who can solely, with his mandate, end the physical life of Jesus, or reject the charges that were being brought against Him.

We also read of His counterpart, a woman unnamed in the gospel but through historical research and records, identified as the wife of Pontius Pilate, named Claudia Procula, Procla, or Percula. As a wealthy Roman, she lived in Caesarea but traveled with her husband to Jerusalem, which may have suggested a close relationship with her husband, or that she had some influence with her family's background, and some histories describe her as a

convert to Judaism so she would have been familiar to Jewish customs and the culture.

What we do know, based on scripture, is that she receives in a dream, a revelation so moving, so gut-wrenching, that she is faced with a decision to act upon this knowledge that she has, or to do nothing and keep quiet. She does not have the power to free Jesus herself, but she is close to the one who can, and while her husband sits on the judgment seat, she sends an urgent message to him.

In many ways, today's passage gives us wisdom in that we all have a choice, whether it's on the periphery, or in the center, to act upon what God reveals in our lives, for those around us, and we can choose to be obedient, or to do nothing; to turn toward Jesus, or away from Him; to let in God's love and trust Him, or let our fear, doubt, our pride and selfishness to quench the movement of God and the Holy Spirit.

From the book of Matthew, chapter 27:11-26. *11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so."*

1 *2 But when He was accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. 13 Then Pilate said to Him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" 14 But He gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. 15 Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. 16 At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 17 So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18 For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Him over.*

19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent Man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about Him." 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said "Barabbas." 22 Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let Him be crucified!" 23 Then he asked, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let Him be crucified!" 24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he

took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25 Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26 So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Wow, what a charged scene! THERE IS A LOT GOING ON HERE! Accusations, interrogation, a disturbing dream, the mob about to riot, shouts of crucifixion... Yikes! And in the midst of this, Jesus is calm in the center.

Let's look at a bit of context to help us out. We know that by this point in our passage today, Jesus has stirred up so much fear, jealousy and controversy with the chief priests and religious leaders of the day, the Sanhedrin, that they not only reject Him, but actually decide to scheme and lie to arrest Jesus and kill Him.

In chapter 26, verse 3-4, it says, *"Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him."* Yikes!

I want to show you a painting called "Christ Before Pilate" drawn in 1881 by an artist named Mihaly Munkacsy (Meehai Munkachee), a Hungarian artist who was known for his large-scale Biblical drawings.



In this painting, you can see Pontius Pilate sitting on the judgment seat in the Praetorium, the governor's headquarters, with the chief priests, religious leaders and some in the crowd surrounding him with their demands. The one pointing at Jesus is probably Caiaphas, the chief priest, and Pilate is on the seat. He's frowning, arms crossed, knowing that they are accusing Jesus out of jealousy, envy and self interest. This we know from verse 18, *"For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him"*.

The scheming and manipulation of the chief priests and religious leaders is calculated and thought through. In the painting, you see a cluster of three men behind Caiaphas and it looks like they are plotting. You see, they knew that they could not get Jesus killed on their own—they had no actual authority to inflict the death penalty. To kill Jesus, they would have to get the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate to rule that sentence. So- what charge could they possibly formulate to take to Pontius Pilate, and demand the death of Jesus? We see more details from the gospel of Luke, who gives us more information about the three-fold charge held against Jesus.

Luke 23:2 says, *2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We have found this Man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king."*

The Sanhedrin knew that their charge of blasphemy would go deaf on Pilate's ears. He would just dismiss them and tell them to settle their religious squabbles amongst themselves.

So here's the scheming- First, They charged Jesus with being 1) a revolutionary, 2) with inciting the people not to pay their taxes, and 3) with claiming to be a king (Luke 23:2). All three are fabricated political charges, the only on such charges they knew that Pilate could actually act upon.

Have you ever had an instance where you were faced with fabricated lies, maybe an accusation or blame that you know, in your heart is just not true. Maybe it's a blame from family or at your work, an accusation that you know is not true. Maybe you're in the middle of such struggle, you feel targeted, the butt of a cruel prank or feeling bullied. You know that things' being said about you that are false, and every bone in your body wants to scream out the truth, exposing the liars and clear your name.

If this is your struggle, know that Jesus is with you. He knows of your pain, the injustice and the struggle and that He gives you peace and healing in His name. So many times He stood

before His accusers, knowing the lies, even knowing the darkness of their hearts because God sees into the hearts of all.

In 1 Samuel 16:7- it says, *"For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* The Lord does not look at what the world looks at, but knows the motivation of the heart and He perpetuates His kingdom values, which are those of honesty, righteousness, integrity and humility against the pressures of the world.

Jesus stood innocent, before His accusers, and before the very man who would sentence His death. But Jesus did not turn from the task before Him. His focus was on the mission He was called to fulfill on Earth.

The woman we study in today's passage also knew that Jesus stood innocent. She describes Jesus as that innocent man. The translation of this word "innocent" MEANS righteous, just- correct, and by implication innocent. This revelation comes from a dream so powerful, so intense and disturbing that she sends a message to her husband while he is deliberating the fate of Jesus. Now there are numerous dreams recorded in the Bible, but only one of a woman, in the passage we study today.

When we think about dreams we can think of them as imaginary, kinda lalala weird, or a bad pizza sort of dream, like dreams that you missed your final exam, or showed up

to a meeting naked, without your pants on, stuff like that.

My latest bad pizza dream involved food. Some of you know I am a foodie- I love food, and I really enjoy preparing food for a group event.

I was recently preparing food for a church event and I decided to make vegetable skewers. I spent all evening positioning each vegetable on the skewer, then lovingly basting each vegetable with garlic oil, basil, balsamic vinegar and spices.

It was quite late when I went to bed, and in the middle of the night I had this crazy dream that when I woke up in the morning, my 16 pound dog had climbed on top of the kitchen counters and dining table and eaten all the food I had prepared and there was nothing left to eat for the event! I was so disturbed that I ran out and checked, until I saw that all the food was still there, and Nela was sleeping in her bed. Okay- so that was probably a bad pizza dream.

But we do know through Scripture that there are prophetic dreams, and numerous dreams are cited as revelation, where angels visit people in a dream, where God gives direction, and even where people are warned on a certain course of action. The gospel of Matthew actually has a number of these dreams- In Chapter 1, Joseph the husband of Mary (Jesus mother), is visited by an angel in a dream.

He thinks about divorcing her quietly because he learns she's pregnant, but after he had *considered this, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said - "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."*

In the book of Daniel in the Old Testament (1:17), it describes the four young Israelites who are carried off to Babylon, and that 17 *To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.*

Jordan Seng, who used to be a pastor here at FPC, and now senior pastor at Bluewater Mission church, often teaches on dreams, prophecy and healing at the Hawaiian Islands Ministries HONOLULU conferences. He wrote a book called, 'Miracle Work: A Down-to-Earth Guide to Supernatural Ministries' that is actually, super practical. If you are interested in supernatural ministry, this book is helpful and practical. Jordan Seng writes, "Scripture suggests that supernatural revelation can happen in a ton of different ways, and God even seems to like being creative (I mean, a burning bush?)...."

Judging from Scripture and experience, you'll more

commonly perceive revelation through visions or impressions in your mind, or through prophetic dreams during sleep (Jeremiah 1:11-16; Luke 4:1; Daniel 2). The Bible uses a rich variety of language to describe the experience of revelation... The point, I think, is to be open."

So you may think, okay, we might read of scriptures of dreams way back then in the Bible, but that's not for today, or I don't know of any current days examples. ...So here is one current day example that is super relevant.

Where you are sitting is the very place where an elder at First Prez, years ago before we moved here, had a LITERAL dream we would be here one day. It was through a literal dream of one man named Don Parker who had a dream while sleeping, and in that dream Pastor Dan preaching at a place called Ko'olau golf club in a robe! This was when the church was on Keeaumoku Street in town, and they didn't know where God wanted the church to move. In fact, when they first looked at the site, the place was not even for sale!

For those of you who have been to Seekers and Joiners, you know of the story of the Miracle of Ko'olau and how we got here. Know that a prophetic dream was a huge part in the story of our church, and it started with a dream given to an elder of the church. The dream lives on today and it's amazing to see the community of God

and what God is building in and through the people here. Sometimes God does talk to us in dreams, and going back to the painting of Christ before Pilate, the one lone voice of truth in that room, amongst the voices of Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas the high priest, other chief priests and scribes, is the woman with a dream, woman who received a revelation in her dream. She is in the center of that painting, and as we look at this painting and contemplate the scene, I ask us, "Who are we in this room? Whom do we relate to?"

Am I one of the chief priests or the Sanhedrin, and am I so offended or jealous, or envious, that I am driven to scheme and lie to preserve myself? Or am I the crowd of those joining in the chant, because I'm just blindly following what others are telling me to do, but I haven't looked into the eyes of Jesus myself. I haven't searched for the truth. I don't listen to Jesus at all but listen to whatever the crowd says, and I don't even know Jesus for myself. Am I Pontius Pilate, driven by self-protection and the pressures of the world. I have to preserve my power, and so I ignore the truth, or convince myself that I'm not responsible. I stay distant, apart, and absolve any responsibility in being a part of God's justice and truth in the world.

Am I the woman, the wife of Pontius Pilate, who is driven to deliver a message of truth? I don't have much power, I may be on the periphery, but I will do what I can with what I have.

Can I relate to some of the characters in this story? Who are we in this story, and what is God telling you through this scene? How am I in my workplace, in my school, and in my home?

The last part in our passage reflects upon the decision of Pontius Pilate. Now we know that Pilate thinks Jesus is innocent. He had told the religious leaders in the gospel of Luke, *"I find no basis for a charge against this man."* In Matthew 27:23, *Pilate asked of the crowd, "Why? What evil has He done?" But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify Him!"*

Could Pilate have made a different decision? Could he have listened to his conscience? Or heed the warning of his wife? But no, he is hardened and governed by fear. Pilate sees a riot about to happen, and he thinks about his position, about what would happen if word got back to the emperor Caesar about another volatile situation with the Jews.

So, Pilate succumbs to the pressure of the crowd. He seeks to do what's best for himself. He succumbs to the pressures of the world, with the pressure of rules governed by the laws of fear, power and corruption.

It was Pastor Steve in his sermon last week, who talked about FEAR. He quoted an American Author who said, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than one's fear." Pastor Steve also noted that it is

our devotion to God, that Widow Sized Devotion, to God's mission that will be the "something else more important than one's fear," which will help us to be courageous in times of pressure and struggle. We can either wash our hands of any responsibility, turning away from God, or turning a blind eye to justice, or we can—through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit—be courageous and bold in the midst of dark times, right where God has placed us.

Alas, Pilate ultimately chose a path of fear. He even tries to absolve his responsibility by washing his hands before the crowd, a Jewish custom referring to the absolution of an unsolved murder in Deuteronomy 21. It describes the atonement for the people of Israel by killing a heifer who has never worked, and then washing your hands above the neck of the heifer. Whatever ritual Pilate was enacting, no hand washing could absolve the responsibility of his actions. He hands over Jesus to be crucified, and the beatings and mockery begins. Jesus is stripped naked and nailed to a cross to die.

The congregation took communion at this point in the service.

We remember the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We contemplate depth of His sacrifice for us, and the magnitude of His love. The Bible says that *God demonstrates His love for us in this: while we were still sinners,*

Christ died for us. Even as Pilate handed Him over to be killed, Jesus died for him as well. Even as the soldiers beat Him, and the chief priests spit on Him, Jesus died for them as well. Jesus died for all, the just and unjust. He died for us no matter our past, no matter our fears and no matter our mistakes. That is the depth of His unconditional love. And as Jackie Pullinger says, a missionary to Hong Kong working with those who are in gangs, in prostitution and with drug dealers, "Jesus would have died for you even if you were the only person on the face of the Earth." That's how much He loves you. Let us remember Him as our Lord and friend, and of His sacrifice, knowing that we can experience the forgiveness of sins and the strength of His love when we move towards Him.

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