

Transformed by knowing Jesus: Pilate

Message for Sunday, March 24, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 27:11-26

Children's Message: Read these Bible verses one after another, to hear repeatedly Jesus saying, "I am telling you the truth."

John 3:3 (TEV)

Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again."

John 5:24 (TEV)

"I am telling you the truth: those who hear my words and believe in him who sent me have eternal life. They will not be judged, but have already passed from death to life."

John 6:47 (TEV)

"I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life."

John 13:21 (TEV)

"I am telling you the truth: one of you is going to betray me."

John 16:7 (TEV)

"I am telling you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you."

Jane and I love the outdoors: we love canoeing and hiking and camping. It's lots of fun to explore places where we've never been. We never know what may be around the next bend in the river, or over the next hill. It's a lot of fun, but it could also be dangerous!

What if we go for a walk in some strange woods, where we don't know the paths, and then we can't remember which path to take to get us back to our campsite? What is the word we use when we're in a strange place and we don't know how to get to safety? (*lost*).

Here is something which can help us. Do any of you know what it is? (*a compass*). The way it works is that the red needle always points to the north. That's because it's made of a magnet, and the top of the earth is like a huge magnet which attracts other magnets.

So if we're lost in the woods, but we know that our campsite is somewhere to the north of us, we can just follow the red needle until we're back home safely.

The Bible is like a compass to give us direction in how to live. People may say to us, "It's OK to do this; *everybody* does it!" And indeed, if God says it's OK, then it is. But the key is: we listen to what God says in the Bible.

Sermon "Transformed by knowing Jesus: Pilate"¹

Introduce Bible reading

Over the last five weeks, we've been meeting people in the Bible whose lives were transformed because they knew Jesus. There are dozens more we could look at besides these few. However, Jesus was not always successful in appealing to people to join him. Today's Bible reading is about one of those people.

Message begins here

Bob loved to make people happy. Bob *lived* to make people happy. If people weren't happy, Bob wasn't happy. So every day Bob set out to make people happy. Not an easy task, for what makes some people happy makes other people angry.

Bob lived in a land where everyone wore coats. The people never removed their coats. Bob never asked, "Why?" He only asked, "Which?" that is, "Which coat should I wear?"

Bob's mother loved blue. So to please her he wore a blue coat. When she would see him wearing blue she would say, "Yay, Bob! I love it when you wear blue." So he wore the blue coat all the time. And since he never left his house and since he saw no one but his mother, he was happy, for she was happy and she said "Yay, Bob" over and over.

Bob grew up and got a job. The first day of his first job he got up early and put on his best blue coat and walked down the street. The crowds on the street, however, didn't like blue. They liked green. Everyone on the street wore green. As he walked past, everyone looked at his blue coat and said, "Yuck!"

Yuck! was a hard word for Bob to hear. He felt guilty that he had caused a "yuck" to come out of a person's mouth. He loved to hear "yay!" He hated to hear "yuck!"

When the people saw his coat and said "yuck," Bob dashed into a clothing store and bought a green coat. He

¹ The story of Bob and his coloured coats is by Max Lucado, from his book *A Gentle Thunder*, p. 113.

put it on over his blue coat and walked back out in the street. “Yay!” the people shouted as he walked past. He felt better because he had made them feel better.

When he arrived at his workplace, he walked into his boss’s office wearing the green coat. “Yuck!” said his boss.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Bob, quickly removing the green coat and revealing the blue. “You must be like my mother.”

“Double yuck!” responded the boss. He got up from his chair, walked to the closet, and produced a yellow coat. “We like yellow here,” he instructed. “Whatever you say, sir,” Bob answered, relieved to know he wouldn’t have to hear his boss say “yuck” anymore. He put the yellow coat over the green coat, which was over the blue coat. And so he went to work.

When it was time for him to go home, he replaced the yellow coat with the green and walked through the streets. Just before he got to his house, he put the blue coat over the green and the yellow coats and went inside. Bob learned that life with three coats was hard. His movements were stiff, and he was always hot. There were also times when the cuff of one coat would peck out and someone would notice, but before the person could say “yuck” Bob would tuck it away.

One day he forgot to change his coat before he went home, and when his mother saw green she turned purple with disgust and opened her mouth to say, “Yuck.” But before she could, Bob ran and put his hand on her mouth and held the word in while he traded coats. When he removed his hand, the word that came out was, “Yay!”

It was at this moment that Bob realized he had a special gift. He could change his colours with ease. With a little practice, he was able to shed one coat and replace it with another in a matter of seconds. Even Bob didn’t understand his versatility, but he was pleased with it. For now he could be any colour anytime and please everyone.

His skill at changing coats quickly elevated him to high positions. Everyone liked him because everyone thought he was just like them. With time he was elected mayor over the entire city. His acceptance speech was brilliant. Those who loved green thought he was wearing green. Those who loved yellow thought he was wearing yellow, and his mother just knew he was wearing blue. Only he knew that he was constantly changing from one to the other. It wasn’t easy, but it was worth it, because at the end everyone said, “Yay Bob!”

Bob’s multicoloured life continued until one day some yellow-coated people stormed into his office. “We have found a criminal who needs to be executed,” they announced, shoving a man towards Bob’s desk. Bob was shocked at what he saw. The man wasn’t wearing a coat at all, just a T-shirt.

“Leave him with me”, Bob instructed, and the yellow coats left.

“Where is your coat?” asked the mayor.

“I don’t wear one.”

“You don’t have one?”

“I don’t want one”

“You don’t want a coat? But everyone wears a coat. It...it... it’s the way things are here.”

“I’m not from here.”

“What coat do they wear where you are from?”

“No coat.”

“None?”

“None.”

Bob looked at the man with amazement. “But what if people don’t approve?”

“It’s not their approval I seek.”

Bob had never heard such words. He didn’t know what to say. He’d never met a person without a coat. The man with no coat spoke again.

“I am here to show people they don’t have to please people. I am here to tell the truth.”

If Bob had ever heard of the world truth, he’d long since rejected it. “What is truth?” he asked.

But before the man could answer, people outside the mayor’s office began to scream, “Kill him! Kill him!”

A mob had gathered outside the window. Bob went to it and saw the crowd was wearing green. Putting on his green coat, he said, “There is nothing wrong with this man.”

“Yuck!” they shouted. Bob fell back at the sound. By then the yellow coats were back in his office. Seeing

them, Bob changed his colours and pleaded, “The man is innocent.”

“Yuck!” they proclaimed. Bob covered his ears at the word.

He looked at the man and pleaded, “Who are you?”

The man answered simply, “Who are you?”

Bob did not know. But suddenly he wanted to. Just then his mother, who’d heard the crisis, entered the office. Without realizing it, Bob changed to blue. “He is not one of us,” she said.

“But, but,…”

“Kill him!”

A torrent of voices came from all directions. Bob again covered his ears and looked at the man with no coat. The man was silent. Bob was tormented.

“I can’t please them and set you free!” he shouted over their screams. The man with no coat was silent, “I can’t please you and them!”

Still the man was silent. “Speak to me!” Bob demanded. The man with no coat spoke one word. “Choose.” “I can’t!” Bob declared. He threw up his hand and screamed, “Take him, I wash my hand of the choice.”

But even Bob knew in making no choice he had made one. The man was led away, and Bob was left alone. Alone with his coats.

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Of course there is no such real person as Bob. But the story is told so that he looks like someone from the Bible. Do any of you know who that was?

He was Pilate, the one who had to choose whether or not to sentence Jesus to death. Pilate knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong, but he listened to the shouting crowd to make his decision.

Some politicians today still base their decisions, not on what is right or wrong, but on what is popular, what the opinion polls say, what will win them votes in the next election.

And it’s not just politicians. Many other people of all kinds base their lives on doing what will please other people. But do you see the problem with this? *You can’t*

please everyone. Trying to live like that causes all kinds of problems.

It’s much better to live by the truth. But, as Pilate said, and as many people say today, “What is truth?”

Here is what Jesus said.

John 18:37, New Century Version:

“This is why I was born and came into the world: to tell people the truth. And everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me.”

John 14:6, New Living Translation:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”

I know that in today’s world where the motto is, “Whatever you feel like doing, as long as you’re sincere about it, is OK,” this sounds old fashioned. It sounds out of touch with reality. It sounds too strict.

It isn’t, really. Following Jesus *gives* life, abundant life. Following the truth doesn’t take away our joy, it increases it.

Ask people who have followed their impulses — to have sex with anyone who comes along, to get drunk every weekend, to make money and power and possessions the ultimate goal of life, to leave their spouse and children and join up with someone else more attractive — ask them if their life is full of joy and peace.

Our world needs the truth. You need the truth. I need the truth.

Next steps:

- Confess: where have you tried to please people, even to the point of doing something you didn’t feel right about?
- Receive: forgiveness; and even more: healing of the guilt and shame; and hope for a new chance to do better.