

**“HE MADE NO FURTHER REPLY”**

*Mark 15:1-5*

Sermon by Mack Dennis, Pastor

The parade has ended, the borrowed colt presumably returned to its owner, the palm branches, once freshly picked, now lie in the gutters of Jerusalem’s streets, browned and curling at the edges, chaff blown by the wind. Since Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he has since preached his last parables, counseled his disciples for the last time, broken bread for his last supper, prayed his last prayers. And now, standing before Pontius Pilate, Jesus says his last words before his crucifixion.

Bound and bloody-lipped from the trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus meets Pilate’s question. With what we might call a tone of sarcasm mixed with disbelief, Pilate asks, “*You* are the king of the Jews?” Jesus responds, “You say so.”

Let us pause for a moment and reflect on how insignificant this handcuffed Galilean man was to someone like Pilate, a Roman Prefect, a Governor who answered to no one outside of Rome. Pilate is most likely annoyed that he has to spend a Friday morning on this scrub king. And what Pilate would have been expecting from this insubordinate peasant was—at the very least—some deference or appropriate recognition of his position. A Roman governor would ask a question, “You are the king of the Jews?” and wait expectantly for the peasant to say, either, “Yes, my Lord,” or “No, my Lord.” Yes or no, “Your Honor.” Yes or no, “Chief.” Yes or no, “Master.” That’s what Pilate was accustomed to hearing and expected to hear from this subject.

But that isn’t how Jesus replies, is it? “You are the king of the Jews?”  
“*You* say so.”

Now, in my Bible, it says in Romans 13 that we are supposed to pay “respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (13:7). Far be it from me to encourage disrespect of authority, but when I hear Pilate ask, “You are the king of the Jews?” and Jesus respond with, “You say so,” what I am hearing from Jesus is impudence. Or, if you will, sass mouth. Clap-back. Backtalk. And we’re all hearing our mothers, now. “Don’t you backtalk me!” Well, Jesus has just backtalked Pilate.

Some translations have Pilate asking Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” But that’s not the way it’s written. The way it’s written is, “*You* are the king of the Jews?” The question begins with *you*. And Jesus’ answer begins with *you*. Which makes this a borderline mocking response. This is the kind of answer that could get you a swift backhand. And what’s more, by his answer, Jesus implies that Pilate has just made a confession about Jesus. “You are the king of the Jews?” *You’ve said it. You’ve said it!*

Maybe the reason Pilate doesn’t have Jesus flogged right there is because he’s impressed with Jesus’ boldness. You can almost hear Pilate saying to himself, “I kinda like this feisty fellow.”

But Pilate is also interrupted with the shouting of the chief priests, who are intent on having Jesus executed. They're not allowed to execute him under Roman rule, so they've got to make their case. "He's committed treason! He told us not to pay taxes to Caesar! He said he's going to destroy the temple! He's a blasphemer!" In the cacophony of accusations, Pilate turns to Jesus and asks, "Don't you have an answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But, Mark says, Jesus made no further reply. And now, Pilate is amazed.

If you didn't know, the State of Texas, has a database of last words by death row inmates. Though I'm not given to morbidity, I went looking for last words of reconciliation, and found many. But the ones that make me wonder the most are those, even those who've since been found to be innocent, are those who chose to say nothing. Why didn't they say anything? It was their last chance to answer, to confess if they had not, to explain, to plead for their lives, to ask for a stay. But when you click on the link that says "Last Statement," there is always the same sentence, "This offender declined to make a last statement." If Jesus had been executed in Texas, you would click on the link today, and it would say, "This offender declined to make a last statement."

When Jesus is taken before the Sanhedrin, they ask him if he is the Messiah, and he says, "I am." And the chief priest, according to custom, tears his clothes at this blasphemy. All who are there condemn him to death. Some spit on him. They blindfold him and strike him. They call on him to prophesy, But this offender declines to make a last statement.

Pilate asks, "Have you no answer?" But this offender declines to make a last statement.

The soldiers lead him into the courtyard of the palace. They clothe him in a purple cloak. They twist some thorns into a crown. They salute him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They strike his head with a reed, spit upon him, and kneel down in homage to him. They strip him and put his own clothes on him. But this offender declines to make a last statement.

They offer him wine mixed with myrrh, but this offender declines to make a last statement.

At 9:00 they crucified him between two bandits. Passersby deride him, "You who would rebuild the temple in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross." The chief priests, scribes are mocking him. "He saved others, he cannot save himself." Even the bandits, Mark says, are taunting him. But this offender *makes no further reply*.

What more can he say than to you he hath said? "They may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand" (Mk. 4:12). There is something about evil that does what it's going to do. Dark forces compel individuals and crowds. The heart is hardened. What explanations can we find for so much wickedness? When the crowds are shouting down the innocent, there is wisdom in silence. Like the young woman standing before the nation yesterday. Emma Gonzales. She named the dead. Then for well over six minutes, leaving her tears to stream down her cheeks, in one of the most powerful speeches in our nation's history, she made no further reply.

“Have you no answer?” Pilate asks. But Jesus is finished responding. In speech and in silence Jesus is the Son of God. And his is the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! So, there will be no more answers. Only one final question, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus’ last word is not a word but a cry, “a loud cry,” and he breathes his last. The centurion, who has heard so many loud and agonizing cries during his military service, is dumbfounded. “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

Then there is silence. Silence until early on Sunday morning, until we hear the granite grinding as the stone is rolled away, and see Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, standing, dumbfounded, as the angel explains to them, “He is not here for He is risen. He’s gone ahead of you. Look! There’s where he lay.”

His words echo against an empty tomb. The women make no further reply. Rather, they run. Terror and amazement seize them. And they say nothing to anyone, for they are afraid....

