

Fault by Default¹

I'm looking at Pontius Pilate with new eyes these days. I'm looking at him as an example of leadership—obviously as an example of deeply flawed leadership. Pilate is the single individual in the story of Jesus' crucifixion who had the power, indeed the authority, to put a stop to humanity's most shocking moment—putting to death God incarnate. And Pilate blew it.

Pilate, for example, had all the information he needed to make a proper decision which, of course, was that Jesus was innocent of any crime against the Roman Empire. Pilate sends Jesus to Herod for a second opinion. If Herod thought that Jesus deserved punishment he would have administered such punishment himself. But guilt was not Herod's verdict. And so, as our lesson puts it, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate.

The two biggest leaders in the area, Herod and Pilate, are in complete agreement. Pilate, nevertheless, capitulates to the insistence of the Jewish religious officials and releases Jesus into their vengefulness.

What kind of man would cave in as we see Pilate caving in here? I'm guessing that what we see here is the way Pilate was oriented to all of life. We see his kind everywhere—even in ourselves. His life is one of weighing all the pressures

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bearing on him and choosing the safest path. Political expedience is a word to describe it. We see this in politics, business, education, the church.

Have you noticed that the character—the basic orientation of the heart—the character of a leader, tends to color everything within the sphere over which that person presides? The boss's inner being, his or her deepest values, these fill the entire company or department. The teacher's attitude affects the attitude of every student in the classroom. Have you ever seen a change in leadership which brings an entirely new climate to the office or organization? It's amazing how true that old statement is, that an organization is like the extended shadow of its leader.

Now, what brings up this talk about leadership and thoughts about Pontius Pilate's leadership character? Well, I'm discovering, along with the Celebrations Class, some things about Christian character and Christian virtue that are breathtaking and, for me, really new. Did you know that the ultimate destination for Christian life which is everlasting life is for Jesus' followers to preside over some aspect of God's restored creation? Think. Eternal life isn't sitting on a cloud playing a harp being supposedly happy. The Bible's

vision of salvation and everlasting life is reigning with Christ over some part of his restored world.

Psalm 8:

What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
⁵Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned
them with glory and honor.
⁶You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
⁷all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
⁹O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Now, if I were you sitting there listening to this, I'd be thinking, "Doug is nuts. I've never heard that everlasting life is presiding or ruling over something. The preacher may have located a single passage that seems to say that and he is trying to sell the idea that the whole Bible is saying that.

But here's the deal. The whole Bible is saying that. The ultimate vision for human being is one day reigning with Jesus over his wonderfully restored world.

First chapter of Genesis: "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion over..." basically the animals. Last chapter in the Book of Revelation says that, together with God and Christ, Christ's servants shall worship him and reign over all things.

Someone says, "I don't want to reign over anything. I just succeeded in not being an officer in my homeowner's association. Why would I want to lead something for eternity?" One reason that some of us may not like the idea of ruling over some sphere is because the wounded ideas of leadership coming from this age and our culture, may be filling your imagination. The Bible leads us to believe that reigning will be servant leadership. It will be all about love and fairness and fruitfulness. We will reign in concert with the loving reign of Jesus.

Do you remember the Parable of the Talents, the one about the landowner leaving his servants in charge of the estate while he was out-of-town? That parable ends with a kind of vision of eternal life. The servants who did a good job managing property were given more property and more responsibility. Remember the line? "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. Now you will be given much. Enter into the joy of your master." Isn't this a kind of vision of eternal life? The servants who did a good job managing property were given more property and more responsibility. A rough interpretation might be, God gives you and me some situation to look after. Some have families, some have a church, some have a garden, some have a whole corporation. Everyone is a leader somewhere. When our loving, nurturing, wise, productive

leadership proves fruitful, because we preside as Jesus would preside, then God gives us a larger garden, a larger city in the life to come. Ah ha! Suddenly eternity sounds a lot more interesting.

Pilate is an altogether good example of how not to lead. What if he had been a principled and wise hand at the helm? What if he had skills to calm down holiday crowds? What if he had quelled the hatred of the religion leaders and even used the troops at his disposal to keep civic order?

He didn't do any of that because he simply lacked the character qualities—calm, wisdom, prudence, fortitude, justice and the like—to have had such a good outcome. What happened is that the Son of God was murdered in his territory, under his watch. And Pilate is forever named in the Apostles' Creed as the one who could have stopped it.

I've mentioned the name of John Patterson before, a leader who deservedly enjoys iconic status in Dayton, Ohio. In 1913, Patterson was the head of the National Cash Register corporation. Hundreds of assembly line workers worked for NCR putting together complex cash registers. In those days, the Great Miami river flowed through the heart of Dayton with no levees to keep the waters within the banks. In 1913 there were extensive rains upstream of Dayton and news reports of the river

levels miles upstream reached John Patterson. Patterson had the insight to realize about a day in advance that Dayton would be severely flooded. Without hesitation, Patterson devoted the entire NCR Corporation to relief work and the manufacture of row boats. By the time Dayton was ten feet under water there were literally hundreds of rowboats picking up stranded victims.

Now, I don't know what John Patterson's faith was. But it's worth pondering what manner of man this must have been to have done such a courageous thing so automatically. Wisdom. Love. Fortitude. Industry. Generosity. Teamwork. Faith. Hope.

Today we get a little palm cross as we celebrate Palm Sunday. Take with your cross this thought. Our essence and destiny is that we will reign with Jesus in a creation made new. And we don't have to wait for that day. Right now, each of us presides over some sphere. Someone depends on each of us. To follow Jesus Christ is, in good part, to learn how you may preside in your situation. Pilate blew it. But with you and me, God can live and reign in our world. And we ourselves can share his throne.