

March 30, 2018 – Soli Gloria Patri
By Wayne J. Schneider

“Are You On Auto-Pilate?”

St. John 18:28–19:26

In all other respects, Pontius Pilate was not a bad person. Yet, for his role in the death of Jesus, he is known for this verse: *“he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.”* Pilate was a career military/political official in a difficult section of the Roman Empire. His tenure as Roman governor was the second longest of any governor, at ten years. He was known for his just rulings. In St. John’s gospel it appears as if Pilate wants to do right for Jesus, but it was Passover week, and some of the religious leaders are livid.

The governor has a heartbreaking moral flaw: he is a coward. Instead of fame he becomes infamous: he is not known for his many correct decisions, but only for his wrong choice. I think I identify with him here. Sometimes all of the good things we do are erased by one stupid or ill-conceived decision. We make a judgment call then realize we are wrong.

But, it was Pontius’ fault. It was not a misjudgment on a traffic violation; he made a fatally wrong choice. He listened to the crowd noise instead of the still small voice of God, even when his conscience screamed that Jesus was innocent.

Pilate’s experience told him the the crowd is almost always wrong. It is wrong when a few use their power to impose injustice on a majority, by overwhelming them by superior numbers. Or, by tyrannizing individuals who have the audacity to disagree with them. God rarely uses the cacophony of a mob; instead, God is championed precisely because some individual is willing to stand up, no matter how unpopular. Pilate was willing to put the world before God. Ultimately, Pilate chose the service of Caesar over the worship of God.

To add insult to injury, he fails to take responsibility for his actions. Symbolically, he washes his hands of Jesus: *“I am innocent of this man’s blood; I find no fault in him; it is your responsibility if you kill him.”*

It was not the religious leader's responsibility. That fell to Pontius Pilate. No one else had this authority, save Caesar. No one but Pilate. Neither can we. When faced with these kinds of spiritual questions about Jesus Christ, we cannot lay off that responsibility on anyone else. It is ours.

The most important decision you and I will ever make is the same one Pilate made: "*What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?*" (St. Matthew 27:22) Shall we stand with him for truth, or shall we crucify him again and again, by the things we do that kill his spirit within us, that drown out that still, small voice speaking to us?

Good Friday is the day when Jesus stands before us, and we must now decide: what will we do with this Jesus, who is called the Christ? Alleluia. Amen.