



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### April 3, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

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## Fifth Sunday of Lent: Jesus before Pilate (part 2), John 19:1-16

To be completely honest, the Gospel of John has always been my least favorite of the four gospels. In this, I am not alone. I would venture to guess that if you polled mainline and progressive clergy, they would rank John dead last of the four.

Most think of John as too exclusionary, too ahistorical, and too theological, and worst—too anti-Jewish. Much of the greatest evil the world has ever known has come from misreading John. The passage today is a big part of the problem. It continues to pain Pilate as this reluctant leader who acquiesces to the demands of the blood-thirsty Jews. The Common English Bible translation softens this a little by referring to no to “the Jews,” but instead to “the Jewish leaders.”

This is a (linguistically and Biblically faithful) attempt to be clear that the tension here is with the leadership—not the people. Still, the anti-Jewish rhetoric is strong, and it has had terrible repercussions over the centuries.

I was once at a preaching conference in Minneapolis with my best friend Eric. We were at an evening event that was held at a local tavern called “Beer and Hymns.” We found ourselves next to Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis. We were a little star-struck. Dr. Lewis was one of the organizers and hosts of the event. She was one of the scholars who introduced the other speakers. She had a lecture herself that we were looking forward to. She wrote an entire commentary about the Gospel of John.

We introduced ourselves, talked about the great work she had done. We sang “How Great Thou Art” together with 100 other clergy in this upstairs room of a Minneapolis tavern. Then caught up in the exuberance and familiarity of the moment, Eric said to her, “You know, I don’t really like the Gospel of John.” Yes, he said that to one of the preeminent scholars on the Gospel of John in the world.

She laughed, and said “Why not?” So we told her. The exclusionary language that has been used to cut-off interfaith relationships; the ahistorical nature of the narrative that puts it at odds with the other three gospels; the anti-Jewish lan-

guage that has resulted in so much evil. The speech and actions of Jesus feels much more divine and less human.

She laughed. She had heard it all before. We bought her another glass of wine and she told us:

John is about community and relationships. It was written to a group of people that had lost their place in communal life. The fourth gospel is written for a group of people (probably in modern day Turkey) who were Jewish, but were convinced that Jesus was the messiah. They believed in his resurrection, and believed that he was the Son of God. For this, they were expelled from the synagogue. It was no longer possible for them to be Jewish and claim that Jesus was the Christ.

It was a story written after a bad breakup. The community of Jesus followers were vulnerable. They lost their social network. They lost their safety net. They lost their place in the community for believing that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The Gospel of John was written to encourage them. In the process, it feels anti-Jewish sometimes. Like most breakup songs, someone has to be the “bad guy.” It feels very “us or them” sometimes. It feels very exclusionary—but that is because it was helping this people define themselves.

They would be saved from shame, isolation, and ostracization in one way—by uniting together in their faith in Christ. . This is the only way they could survive as a community. There was only one way to salvation—holding onto one another. They suffered a bad breakup, but they still knew God. To know God is to know Christ, and so to love God is to love Christ. And the only way to love Christ was to love one another.

That night in Minneapolis, I changed the way I understood the Gospel of John. Dr. Lewis laughed as we thanked her and we sang more hymns together. Since we were in Minneapolis, the song “Purple Rain” was in our hymnal that night (“Purple Rain” a breakup song by Minneapolis’s favorite son, Prince). In that community of clergy I knew what she meant about needing each other. A song about a bad breakup could cause a lot of pain. What we really need is each other, being willing to sing and laugh in the Purple Rain.