In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The story of the Passion and Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus is a magnificent and heartrending story. I figure that we could dive into the story at any point and find something good for our souls. This time, I want to dive into the story at the point where the Roman Governor, Pilate, is examining Jesus. My text, then, goes this way:

4 And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you."
5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered. (Mark 15:4-5, RSV)

The man wondered. He is perplexed by Jesus. He is undecided what to do with this Jesus. He has not yet condemned Jesus. He is still pondering the case. But clearly there is something about Jesus that has arrested Pilate, slowed him down, and led him to spare some thought for this man Jesus. Judges take their responsibilities seriously. At the start of the day, many of them probably pray for God’s help for the decisions they will make that day. Still, a seasoned judge probably can size up the case before him, before her, and pretty quickly make the decision. But this man, Pilate, pauses. He “wonders,” our text says. Wondering is a good thing, I want to suggest. If some of you are wondering about Jesus, wondering whether he might be worth changing some things for and living for, or wondering whether, though you already walk with him, perhaps you should walk even closer with him, well, I count such thoughts to be good thoughts, and I pray that you will decide in favor of Jesus. Pilate did not, but you can, and I hope you will.

Farther on down the road, in the days of the early church, another high governmental official finds himself in a situation similar to that of Pilate. This man is King Agrippa. He is not asked to judge Jesus, but rather St. Paul, who bears moving witness to Jesus. Agrippa listens to Paul and is almost convinced by the man. The King’s famous words go this way:

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Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me
to be a Christian. (Acts 26:28, KJV)

That is the King James Version. A more modern translation puts the words
this way:

At this Agrippa said to Paul, ‘A little more, and your
arguments would make a Christian of me.’ (Acts 26:28,
JNB)

Almost persuaded... left wondering before divine matters. It is a good state to
be in. If any of you are in that wondering state, I hope you will move on
toward Jesus, or move even closer to him, throw in your lot with him for the
rest of your days. Let me tell you why!

First off, I note this: When Jesus stands before Pilate, Jesus had much of
which he could have complained. He had been mistreated while in official
hands. In particular let me mention those who mocked Jesus. The troubling
words go this way:

65And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face,
and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” And the
guards received him with blows. (Mark 14:65, RSV)

The angels above did flinch and turn away, I am quite sure, at the sight of this
spitting and striking of God. Our earth could well be ashamed that the Second
Person of the Holy Trinity, the only begotten Son of God, comes to our earth
and is spit upon and hit with cruel fists. Now, Jesus stands before Pilate and
could have complained about it. He could have reported what the guards did
to him, but he says not a word about it. It leaves Pilate wondering:

5But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate
wondered. (Mark 15:4-5, RSV)

Jesus could have complained to Pilate about the Twelve, how his disciples
had fled and abandoned him. Even if Pilate would have nothing official to say
about the disciples letting Jesus down, still Jesus could have poured out his
heart somewhat to Pilate. He could have lamented, “Is there any sorrow such
as my sorrow, to have been deserted by my friends?” But Jesus mentions not a
word about his disciples. Jesus is just about silent, so that Pilate is left
wondering.

If Pilate had judged Jesus to be a fool, he would not have hesitated so, and
he would not have tried to save Jesus. But he did. He did try to save Jesus:
And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?” 13 And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” 14 And Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has he done?”

In the end, Pilate yielded to the cries to crucify this man. And yet, for a blessed moment or two, Pilate paused. Pilate wondered. It is a good state of the soul to be wondering about Jesus.

Here is what I think Pilate sensed. Here is why I think Pilate hesitated and perhaps wondered whether he was making the biggest mistake of his career. I like to think that Pilate paused and wondered because he had a feeling that maybe he was in the presence of great Love. This prisoner is mocked and scorned, beaten and exhausted, but he seems transfixed by a mission, and perhaps it is a good mission! Rumor of the good Jesus had done might have reached Pilate. The preaching, the healings, the hope, the forgiveness brought by Jesus might have reached Pilate’s ear. In St. Matthew’s version of the story, Pilate is even warned by his wife to do no harm to this good man, Jesus:

... while [Pilate] was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream.”

(Matthew 27:19, RSV)

And laying that aside, in our text — St. Mark’s spare version — clearly there is something about the conduct of Jesus before Pilate that arrests that Roman official, causes him to hesitate, causes him to wonder.

And he does well to wonder because he is beholding wondrous Love at work. Compared to the love Jesus has for you, for me, the blows of the guards are a small matter. Compared to the love Jesus has for his disciples, their denial and betrayal of him is a small matter. Such things can be forgiven.

Do you remember the conduct of Jesus before the woman caught in adultery? Just as Jesus does not stop to argue with Pilate or to complain to the man, so Jesus was strangely silent before the woman everyone else was planning to stone. They challenge him. What do you say about this woman? But Jesus conducts himself as if he does not even hear them. St. John tells the story this way:

But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. (John 8:6, KJV)
This silence of Jesus! What is it about? Why is Jesus not complaining? Why is he not condemning? The broadest and most wonderful answer is that Jesus is preoccupied by love. Guided by that love, all Jesus says to the woman is this:

Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:11, KJV)

Compared to his mission of love for the world, the disloyalty of his disciples, the blows and spitting of the guards, even the questions of mighty Pilate mean little. Those things cannot distract Jesus as he continues his path toward the Cross for the salvation of you, of me.

Therefore, if you should find yourself wondering, “Is it time in my life to give myself over to Jesus even more than I ever have?” I beg you to answer, Yes! For in giving yourself over to him, you are giving yourself over to the One who loves you with his whole heart. If you should be wondering, “Is it time in my life to make some changes, to live a more Christ-like life, I urge you to answer, Yes! This Man who bears the Cross for you, for me, is well worth living for. Let us do this thing. Let us live for Jesus even more than we ever have before. To him belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen