

**Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-up Notes**  
**February 25, 2024**  
**Rev. Dr. Andrew Keuer**

Sermon Text for Lent 2: John 19:1-5

Title: “The Purple Robe” / Series: “Things He Carried”

Core Observations of the Texts

**1. The So-Called Trial:** John chapters 18-19 narrate the six hours from Jesus’ arrest to crucifixion. The charge that the Jewish leaders bring against Jesus is ultimately unclear in John’s account (see their evasion in John 18:29-30). John 5:16-18 had set the stage for what the religious charge that they probably brought to the High Priest in John 18:19-24 (i.e., Sabbath-breaking and claiming to be God’s Son). Pilate had heard rumors that Jesus talked of a kingdom he was bringing to Jerusalem (see John 18:33-36). The upshot is that the Jewish leaders found nothing wrong in Jesus but wanted him gone!

**2. Worldly sorrow & laughter:** Pilate decides that shaming Jesus by public scourging will likely appease the ravenous Jewish leaders, but then Pilate removes himself from the scene (he is not present in 19:1-3). Bible scholars commonly understand Pilate’s distance to signal deep sorrow. When, in the next sentence (19:4), Pilate declares Jesus innocent, it becomes clear that he sorrows over the absurd cost of doing the right thing in this situation. Thus, Pilate ultimately sorrows over the weakness of innocence in the real world. “Too bad that being moral is a terrible investment,” he might say. Ancient philosophers said that only humor can make bearable life thus understood. Hence, the joking of the soldiers (19:2, “Hail King!”), which Pilate himself joins in 19:5 (“Here’s your guy!”).

**3. Divine sorrow & laughter:** God’s sorrow is utterly different, for innocence is not weak (as the resurrection will soon prove) nor should we ever feel sorry for God. God sorrows over Pilate’s naivete. Pilate thinks a public humiliation (19:1) will stop the hatred of the Jewish leaders, but 19:2-3 prove it only serves to add fuel to the fire. God’s joy and laughter in this situation is threefold: First, when Roman soldiers give Jesus the purple robe, they are unknowingly re-enacting 1 Maccabees 10 when the Jew Jonathan was given a purple robe and thus granted rights to lead an army (i.e., these soldiers are making Jesus their boss!). Second, Pilate’s statement “here is the man!” (19:5) makes Pilate a prophet who repeats God’s message in 1 Samuel 9:17 to present Saul as Israel’s first king. Third, the phrase ‘given-over’ or ‘handed-over’ is used in eight times in chs 18-19 (18.2, 5, 30, 35, 36; 19.11, 16, 30). John 3:16 uses this word ‘giving’ (“God loved the world in this way: He gave over his only Son...”) which shows that God is the One who guides and directs the dark sin at play in Jesus’ so-called trial.

Questions to Ponder

- 1. Worldly sorrow:** Have you ever felt sorry for someone who was innocent? Why would it be more fitting to feel sorry for those who condemn the innocent?
- 2. Worldly laughter:** How would it go if you fasted from ungodly laughter (i.e., “laughter at”) for the remainder of the Lenten season?
- 3. Godly sorrow:** Why does God sorrow when we underestimate the depth and persistence of sin in our own hearts and in the hearts of those around us?
- 4. Godly laughter:** How does God’s humor (of the kind described above) give you resilience in the face of moral evil?

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Two books were referenced in the sermon: Mark Osler’s *Jesus on Death Row* and Joan Taylor’s *What Did Jesus Look Like?*