

Order of Worship for March 24th, title, "Ruling Wills", text, John 18:28-40 and 19:1-16,
Palm Sunday

Opening Song
Welcome

Invocation: Isaiah 44:6-8

Message Theme: As Pilate was torn between the will of God in Jesus and the will of the people against Jesus, so we must choose who is our king, Jesus or Caesar.

Worship Theme: There is only one God, and we must serve Him

Sunday Evening in the Word
1 Peter 1:1-25
Please join us for an interactive study
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Church Library

"The Prayer Closet"
March 24, 2013
"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Steve and Carol Lyons in Tanzania:** the Lord will give wisdom and strength and multiplied opportunities to the four teachers who were miraculously given permanent assignment in the schools they have been serving with the gospel; the Spirit will stir up workers locally and in the States to further their work; the Lord will bring a revival and a harvest of souls
2. **President Obama:** the Lord will bring a new heart and a renewed mind to the president, full of thankfulness and eager for truth; the Spirit will impart wisdom for exposing evil and fostering what is good; the father will ensure good health and protection from all evil
3. **The Elders:** the Lord will give them clarity regarding His will for the future staffing and ministry development of the church; the Spirit will draw them to a place of unity regarding current and future projects
4. **Military and Public Service Personnel of the Week:**
5. **Young Adult of the Week:**

Message as preached 3/24/13

Though today is Palm Sunday, in moving through the Gospel of John we are actually down to [Jesus'] last day. Jesus is enduring, as we consider the words of John, the mock trial by Pilate, the governor sent from Rome to keep the Jews of Palestine in line. It is important for us to appreciate that Pilate's concern was not justice and his concern was not peace. All Pilate wants is order. When he thinks of order, when the Roman Empire thought of order, they thought of people standing quietly, working hard, paying their taxes and counting their lucky stars that things were not worse than they were. We should remember that; it was the attitude of the State at that time, and may I say it is often the attitude of the state.

Pilate was intensely aware of the swarming crowds of pilgrims that had come to the city of Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover, and he was also intensely aware of their volatility: they were easily stirred up. The Jews were amongst the most difficult people in the whole empire to rule. They tended to be passionate, breaking out and rioting over anything that they felt insulted their God. We could probably use a little more of that ourselves, but there was more than enough at that time. Pilate was probably also aware that the crowds that were surging around in the city were easily controlled by the priest who ran the temple. They had gathered to worship at the temple and even though they didn't always like the priests, nevertheless they recognized them as being God's men and having charge of the temple. They could be easily swayed [by the priests] one way or another. These things would disturb Pilate a great deal.

In reading through this passage I came up with this particular perspective: who is in charge? That is why I entitle the message, "Ruling Wills". The passage is John 19:1-16. The passage introduces us to the intensity of the crowd and the events that are going on and would obviously raise in us the question of who is in charge. Do we remember when the riots first occurred outside the National Democrat Presidential Convention? It was almost unprecedented. We had not experienced political controversy like that for almost a hundred years. We forget that if you go back into the 19th century sometimes things were really hot, and if you go back to the Civil War there was the outbreak of actual violence. But here it was unsettling as we watched the Television program and you thought, "Who is in charge? Who is going to establish order? How is this going to come out in the end?"

The reason I am mentioning this is so that you and I can step into the emotional drama of this passage because that is how God dealt with those people then and He wants to capture our attention now. Read with me John 19:1-16.

"Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no

guilt in him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Behold the man!' When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, 'Crucify him, crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.'"

Let us stop right here. You do understand what you just heard? This is the casual getting rid of a human being. He is not guilty: Pilate knows he is not guilty. He takes an innocent man and he whips him and then he lets him be abused by the soldiers. Then, as mentioned last week, he brings [Jesus] out and what Pilate was saying was, "This is a piece of junk!" And in response, instead of the priests saying, "Yeah, what a joke; let's go and have lunch", instead they burst out with this furious hatred: "Let him die." We need to be in there to understand the flow of these events. Let us go back to the Word.

"The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.' When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.'

"From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.' So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' they cried out, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' So he delivered him over to them to be crucified."

Let us step back from that scene for a moment and reflect on how dramatically things have changed from the day that Jesus entered the city and that puts us in sync with today, which is Palm Sunday. That was a red letter day for many of the Jews; at least it was a red letter day for the Jews that lined the road [where Jesus was]. They were ecstatic. This was the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. This is what John wrote in 12:12-15,

"The next day the large crowd that had come to the [Passover] feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm, trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of

Israel! And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!''

The people of Israel had good reason for their excitement [regarding Jesus' arrival.] If you have followed through the narrative of the Gospel Jesus has just gotten through raising a man from the dead. We are told that many had walked the approximate 2 to 3 miles to Bethany and had celebrated this remarkable fact. He had raised up Lazarus from the dead, called him out of the rock-hewn tomb after [Lazarus] had been in the tomb for four days. That was dramatic evidence of the action and power of God. Jesus had performed lots of miracles and even if rumor had multiplied them, there were hundreds of eye-witnesses. Today we [tend to doubt or be unsure of those miracles], but they would not have had a moment's question. They knew those things had happened. So it was extremely exciting for them, as indeed it should have been. Then Jesus does this last thing: He arranges to come into the city of Jerusalem in the exact fulfillment of the prophecy given by Zechariah almost four hundred years before the event. So when they saw Him riding this donkey coming into the city of Jerusalem, they knew what He was saying. He was saying, "Here I come; I am the king!" That is what He was saying, and they got it and they were excited about it, and they were right to be excited about it.

Masters and slaves; rulers and subjects; tyrants and rebels: in a fallen world at any time there is always a contest of ruling wills seeking to direct the affairs of men. The hope of that crowd was that now finally God through the messiah would step in, straighten things up, get rid of the Roman pagans and put the house of Israel not only in order, but on top. But who really was in charge? In the narrative that John writes, he really presents to us four choices: it could have been the crowd. If you follow through the narrative you realize that oftentimes both Pilate and the High Priests are anxious about the crowd, they feel like they need to please the crowd and make sure that they don't cross the [crowd's] perception or will and get themselves in the eye of the crowd's anger. That is one of the possibilities. Another possibility is the disciples. These are the men whom Jesus called together and specifically had trained and we know that Jesus was going to be entrusting His ministry to them. Perhaps they were the ones who were really in charge. Or perhaps it was Rome: the legions and guards in control of the city. After all Jerusalem is a subject city controlled by a foreign power. They are very anxious, they know they can only go so far before they cross the line and Rome will act. Or perhaps it is the Sanhedrin [that is in charge]. [They were] masters of manipulation, able to control the crowd, putting immense pressure on Pilate. You can see in the narrative that Pilate himself that, having at first resisted the Sanhedrin, finally caves to them. So maybe it is the Sanhedrin that is in charge.

Of course there is God. Doctrinally all of us in this room would probably say, "Well of course God was in charge." But the issue is, if you were there at that time and you were

standing right on the edge of the crowd, would you be sure that God was in charge? It is all well and good for us to sit in this quiet, peaceful room and make affirmations that we know are doctrinally correct. But the issue is not what happens in this room. The issue is what happens when we are out there and we are in the midst of a culture that is not in agreement with us and they have passions and desires that drive them and will drive us unless we know how to say, "You are not in charge." We need to know who indeed is in charge.

The crowd: we should think about that first. John doesn't mention the Romans first, he moves instead to the crowd. What is the crowd? It is good for us to step back and think about who they were. They were a mixed multitude. They gathered from all over the Empire. They were really on holiday. They are coming back to the city of Jerusalem: let me ask you how many go home at Christmas, or you go home at Easter? Well, that is what they are doing. They would meet up with lots of family and friends and probably a number of them came back year by year. It was a great time for getting together. But probably most of them did not know each other, for they came from all over the Empire. So they were a mixed multitude. But they are not just anybody because for the most part these would have been what we would call respectable people. Why do I say that? They had to be able to afford the journey. They had to be able to travel all the way to Jerusalem as well as to not continue earning money [while they were gone.] There wasn't any [paid leave or vacation time let alone] unemployment compensation! They could not count on that. There was no safety net: they only nets that were around were the ones that would catch you and make you a slave. You had to have sufficient resources saved up to not be productively employed. So these were people of some means. Most of them were there because they were committed to being Jews. They loved the traditions, they loved the covenant; they were there to celebrate the Law and its traditions. That is why they made the pilgrimage. Amongst them were certainly some who knew about Jesus. Lots of the people in Judea and also in Galilee came to the celebration and they would know about Jesus. We already know that quite a few of these people had gone out to the little town of Bethany and had observed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. But the majority hardly knew about Jesus. He was a rumor at most. But the most important thing about the crowd that we are told in the context of John's Gospel is that it could be manipulated. That is the essential thing. What was the crowd like on the day Jesus rode into the city: [it shouted out] "Hooray for Jesus!" What is the crowd like at the end of the week: "let him die!" The obvious warning is that it is plain dumb to give yourself to the crowd; it is just plain dumb. Never allow the crowd to be the thing that rules your heart or your mind. Crowds can be manipulated. They can be turned and twisted. If you study the history of man you know that is exactly what happens to them. People who get caught up in the crowd end up doing things that they never dreamed they would do depending on where the crowd goes. If you want a good solid study of the horrid possibilities of crowds, go study the

French Revolution. If you are not being taught the French Revolution in school my suggestion is that you go and look it up on the internet and get ahold of a few good books. For one of the things that are happening in our age is the erasing of our knowledge of history and the consequence is devastating for all of us. So I encourage you, I exhort you to go and find out about the French Revolution and be glad it was not ours.

What about the second group, so important to us? The second group is the disciples. They are there and we know from the outset that they are not in charge. We know this simply from the flow of events. But it is important for us to get a clear perspective on who they are and what God is doing with them. Let me ask you a question: who are we? Are we not disciples? I hope that we are. As we look at the events around us I hope that we look at them and respond to them with the conviction, "I am a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ; I am His committed servant and I intend to enter this event as a witness for Jesus and a disciple of His teaching. That is my intention." So what about these guys at this particular time? I don't think there is any question that they are devoted to Jesus as their leader and mentor. We know, of course, that at about this time they have lost it. When it came to the crunch, Judas leads the guards of the temple and the Roman guards into the Garden of Gethsemane, and instead of the disciples locking arms and saying, "No way, we are all dead before you get to Jesus," they all ran away. That might be comforting to some of us who like to run, but it should not be comforting to us. We should say to ourselves: [How can this be?] But as John has unfolded the story one of the parts that we need to keep in mind is that the disciples remained blind to the truth. It is important for us to recognize that they remained blind to the truth and lacked understanding by God's design. This is counter intuitive. In John 12:16 John writes, "*His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified then they remembered.*" In Luke 9:45, Luke tells us specifically that what Jesus said about His impending death was hidden from the disciples: "*They did not understand this saying and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it.*" That is odd business isn't it. The first thing for us to understand and to get firmly in our minds is that Jesus did not tell to His men regarding His impending death in order that they would prevent it. After all, who was it that planned His death? It was God, He did. [Jesus] wants them to realize, however, after the fact that Jesus went freely and knowingly to His death, that this was the plan. Whose plan? God's plan; it was God's plan. It is obvious [at this point] that the disciples were not a ruling will.

Having eliminated those two we conclude that the contest, looking at the narrative, for seeing who was in charge will be between the Jews, the religious establishment, or Rome-Pilate, the secular ruling power. The third option is God. What we want is to see how this is at work; we want to see if we understand some things for our own experience.

Let us look first to the Jews. The Jews desire to destroy Jesus. Why do they want to destroy Jesus: They are afraid of Him. They want to destroy Jesus because they are afraid of His influence on the people. Specifically they are afraid that Jesus may stir up this crowd so that the crowd will do something foolish, and if the crowd does something foolish – challenging the power of Rome – then the Romans will bring in maximum force and wipe them out. Remember that that is what they had said earlier when they were scheming regarding what to do about Jesus. They feared the Romans would come in, eliminate the nation and eliminate them. So they are afraid of being blamed by Rome for a problem that Jesus would cause. That is why Caiaphas the high priest said it was better for one man to die for the nation than for the whole nation to suffer. Ironically it was the Jews themselves who stir up a riot and threaten the city.

It is also ironic, in light of what the Jews feared, that when we look at Pilate initially he is not bothered by Jesus at all. When Pilate interviews Jesus he realizes that Jesus doesn't pose any threat. He is not a man of violence; he is not a man who intends to overthrow anything. He is just a man who is preoccupied with truth, whatever that is. That is why [Pilate] says [Jesus] is not guilty. Pilate doesn't mean that [Jesus] didn't do anything wrong; he never even asked that question. All he wanted to find out was whether or not he was a danger. Pilate says he is no danger: let him go!

Pilate is unconcerned. Further and possibly with a certain degree of amusement, Pilate has seen that the animosity of the Jewish leaders is rooted in their envy. A couple of the Gospels mention that he recognized that the Sanhedrin was envious of the popularity of Jesus and they want to destroy Jesus because of their envy. Pilate would probably be aware enough to know that the Law of God, the God of the Jews, said you were not supposed to be envious, and that therefore these men are being sinful. Matthew's Gospel implies that it was for this reason that Pilate offers Barabbas. Who was Barabbas? There was a tradition at the Passover that at the request of the crowd – usually led by the priests – that the Roman governor – would release one prisoner. So we should ask, why would Pilate offer either Jesus or Barabbas? Then we are told about Barabbas: Barabbas was a thief and a murderer. What is mentioned in the Gospels is not just that he is a murderer, but that he committed murder during “the recent insurrection.” An insurrection is a time when all things are in tumult and authority and order are questionable. Reading the narrative it is overwhelmingly the likelihood that Barabbas murdered a Jew, not a Roman. If he had murdered a Roman, he would be dead. So what a choice! Think about being Pilate, about his knowing that these religious leaders are envious of Jesus' popularity. Pilate says, “The tradition is that Rome's magnanimity will let you choose a prisoner to be released. Shall I release Jesus, your King, or Barabbas?” Pilate had arranged that the crowd would have to choose between a good even if curiously unassertive man and a despicable thief and murderer.

That may seem distant from us, but I do not think that it is. You and I are asked to choose between Jesus and others all the time. Let me ask a candid question: Who of us has not at times struggled with the seeming lack of clarity from God? Who of us has wondered at times why God doesn't seem to act? "After all, God, if You expect me to put my life on the line, where are You?" "Why should I walk into this hostile situation and subject myself to all kinds of slanderous comments if I don't see You on the horizon?" Did you ever think that way, feel that way? "You know I have been praying and praying for my friend not to die of cancer and my friend has gotten sicker and sicker and sicker: where are You; what are You doing? How can I have a testimony to the medical staff if it just doesn't make any difference?" I think we face this kind of choice. We face the peculiarity that God so often seems to just not be there, and we are. Then it makes you wonder. It is fine to say, "In the end, God wins all." The trouble is, that is a long ways down the road, and I am having a hard time now. So we question.

He arranged a direct confrontation in the expectation that it would force Jesus' hand, [so that] Jesus would have to act. Who was that? That is [one of the] standard interpretations and understandings of Judas. Maybe what was driving Judas on was that first off when they came into the city and the crowds were shouting and Jesus was by His own design on the donkey, Judas thought, "Yes! We're going to go for it; we're going to do it. Jesus is going to come in. Jesus is going to take over. This is the hour!" Then what did Jesus do? Nothing! So Judas – is this a possibility? – Judas said to himself, "I am going to force Jesus' hand. I know who Jesus is, and I am going to force His hand." So he gets together the temple guards and the Roman guards and takes them into the Garden of Gethsemane and says he is going to force Jesus to defend Himself and to stop the arrest. What do you think Judas would have thought when the whole group fell to the ground when Jesus asked, "Who are you looking for?" and they said, "Jesus" and He said, "I AM!"? But nothing happens! Jesus doesn't stop anything, and Judas kisses Him. It is important for us to be very clear that the plan, God's plan, was that we will act. That is the plan. Not only is that the plan, but at the heart of the plan is that we will act exactly the way Jesus did. That is why the plan was [and is] so hard to believe.

We move on: if Pilate thought that presenting the choice between Barabbas and Jesus would pose a dilemma for the Jewish leadership, he was wrong. First they let Pilate know they wanted Jesus dead. Even for Pilate the death penalty was a serious matter if for no other reason than that as the Roman governor he cannot remain aloof: he is the one who has to sign the order. When Pilate interviews and determines that Jesus is harmless, another idealistic religious fanatic who has managed to offend the religious establishment, he thinks that all he needs to do is to trivialize and degrade Jesus. That is why the flogging, the spitting, the slapping, dressing Him in the mockery of those royal

robes and jamming the crown of thorns on His head. A powerless, bloodied man mocked by the [ecclesiastical] courts, the state, the gentile soldiery and the Jewish leaders themselves surely no longer remains an object of concern let alone danger. But that is not how things turn out at all. John 19:5-8, *“So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the man!’ When the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried out, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’” Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.’ The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.’ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.”*

Understand that at this moment what we are looking at is a chasm breaking open between Pilate and the Jewish leadership. Pilate thought that he was presenting a fundamentally innocent man who was powerless in addition to now being utterly degraded. He was an easy target for mockery. Certainly he was not worth anything more. Why bother executing a man of such worthlessness? What the Jews saw elicited their fury. What did they see? Perhaps the purple robe and crown bring to their mind Jesus’ royal dignity? Certainly Jesus’ outrageous claims were on their mind. In their opinion it is Jesus’ claims to being the Son of God which demanded that either one believed in Him, or at least suspended judgment, or that He die. For them He needed to die. Whether or not Pilate believed in many gods or none, he would have known well enough that the Jewish nation was fanatically devoted to what he saw as the peculiar god that they worshipped, and that He was a God to be feared. Pilate would also know that it was a foolish thing to offend the Jews regarding their God. When John notes that Pilate was probably now more afraid, most likely he was afraid and unsettled by the unanticipated fury of these Jews: that was not what he expected. People who believe nothing in particular are able to believe almost anything, especially under the impulse of fear, and that belief may be shallow, but it can also be enough to force their hand to do things that are regrettable.

Pilate interviews Jesus again. But now Jesus gives no answer. Think about that. Think about being Pilate. Here you have the crowd yelling for His blood. You have the religious authorities insisting on His crucifixion. You have Jesus who is probably so repulsive you don’t want to look at Him: He has not been cleaned up. Pilate says to Him, *“Where are you from?”* and Jesus says nothing. Pilate says, *“You won’t talk to me? Don’t You realize the power I have? I have the authority to release you or to crucify you. How can you not talk to me?”* Then Jesus answers him and what He says is deeply troubling. Pilate looks at Jesus and recognizes that Jesus has not been broken. He is not groveling. He is not crying out for mercy. He is not looking for an angle. He is just standing there. Jesus is prepared to die. You and I know He is [in fact] determined [to die]. Jesus serves a power that is incomprehensible to Pilate, and it is from that power that He derives His strength. It is from that power, as you and I both know, that He is able to stand there calm,

inwardly at peace, perfect in His obedience to His God. No matter what kind of degrading activities have been done to Him, what kind of words have been thrown at Him, what kinds of threats have been laid at His feet, He stands there and then He says to Pilate, *“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”* Now get inside Pilate’s head and start thinking. “What are You talking about? What are You doing? What are you trying to do? Are you pointing in some direction? What direction?” Who could have given Pilate authority from above? If you know anything about Rome, if you know anything about Roman governors, if you know anything about government structure, if you know anything the distribution of power, if you know anything about the way the world works, you know that the minute those statements are made, Pilate starts to get sweaty in the armpits because he is thinking, “Who is looking over my shoulder, who is going to examine the record, who is going to call me to account, where am I going to have to stand and give a justification for what I am doing?” For [Pilate] knows that what he is doing is he is killing an innocent man. So inwardly [Pilate] trembles.

Who would have given him authority from above, or who would he think [had done so]? Of course he would think “Rome”, he would think, “The Emperor”, he was the man who put him in that position. As a proconsul Pilate was appointed directly by the Emperor. Pilate represented the power of the Empire, but more particularly he was the personal representative of the Emperor. Why would Jesus mention this? Was Jesus implying that somehow He would by-pass Pilate by appealing to some higher authority? Was this subtly slighting Pilate’s position, indicating that actually Pilate is an underling, that he is answerable to another? Perhaps there was a hint in Jesus’ comment, saying, “I’m not really too worried about you Pilate, because you’re just a functionary, you just carry out the actions others tell you to carry out.” Did anybody ever treat [one of us] that way? That would be devastating to a man like Pilate. Pilate is caught, as it were, between conflicting powers over which he has no control. That, by the way, is exactly what is brought forward in that last statement which Jesus makes. Just think about this: You’re Pilate, you’re the man in charge, the big guy, you are the governor, you are the one offering choices, you are the one trying to control the situation, and what does Jesus say? “You know what, it’s not you; it is whoever put me in your power. That is where the issue lies.” So it just falls out of Pilate’s hands. “I thought I was the big thing!” “You’re a no thing.” So poor Pilate!

Equally clear in His statement is that Pilate’s sin in judging Him is less than the one who delivered Him into Pilate’s hands. Who rules? Who is in charge? Is it Pilate who fears the Jews and the crowd? Is it the Jews who fear Jesus and the crowd? Or is it Jesus who fears no one? When you read this narrative prayerfully, meditatively and in detail you will gradually come to understand that the One man left standing, to use that cultural phrase,

is Jesus. Amen. He stands there. He is not afraid. He knows His God. He knows that God has called Him. He knows that He is obedient. And He is prepared to die.

As Christians we cannot read Jesus' words without recognizing that it is God the Father Who rules. It is God who gave first Rome and then Pilate the authority he has to rule and to judge. It is explicitly God the Father Who has caused Jesus to be delivered over to Pilate for that judgment. Jesus will die for the sins of the world. And like it or not, Jesus is the model that we are to follow. We are told that over and over and over again. We are to proclaim the gospel. We are to extend the kingdom of righteousness. How do we do that? We do that by living and dying for the truth. We do that by being willing to lay down our lives for God and our neighbor. We do that by demonstrating a self-sacrificing love for our enemies. We are not called to be pacifists. We know that sin must be restrained by law, and at times the law must be imposed by force. But we are Christians. Because we are Christians we understand that our authority is not derived from power or force. It is derived from God. We are servants of God and His saving truth and His redeeming love. We are servants of God, like Jesus was. Consequently, we are committed to waiting for God as God waits for us to grow in faith and become like Jesus, because we are willing and able to die to ourselves. That is the gospel. The gospel that God has given to us is that Jesus Christ has laid down His life in order to free us from the guilt and power of sin so that we now are able to die to our sinful selves and live to a holy God. Do you believe it?

Let us pray: Holy Father many things have been done to the gospel in this age. It has been turned into a sweet song that soothes the fears of people as the prophets did in Jeremiah's day: "Peace, peace; they think to heal My people lightly." We know, our Father, simply in the consideration of what Jesus endured that He might pay for our sins there is no light healing. There is instead the need for us to die with Jesus on that cross. There is the need for us to die to ourselves that we might live to You. There is the need, our Father, for us to rely upon Your Spirit to root out sin and sinful practices from our lives, for we would be holy as You are holy. Thank You so much for Your love for us. Thank You so much for the gift of the Holy Spirit within us. Thank You so much for the undying hope that now burns within us and sustains us that we will walk in faithful service to the end. Father, it is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What do you believe to be the dominant forces or the ruling wills in America today? Are there some such unique or specific to California or Butte County?

2. Why is it difficult to unlikely for the crowd (the assembly of common people) to actually rule? Does this put in question the notion of democracy? (Think of this in terms of the congregation's role in a local church.)
3. Do you see the "band of Jesus' followers" as a "ruling will" today? Do you believe it should be? How might the church best influence society at large?
4. Pilate seeing Jesus as powerless, Pilate saw no threat in Jesus. He was like many rulers, dedicated to order more than to peace. How do these differ? What do you see as the greatest threats to peace in the US today? In the world?
5. Have you ever (often) wondered at God's seeming passivity, the lack of clear and forceful direction coming from God in the midst of all the world's problems and your own questions? Why do you think God is so disengaged? Do you think He is disengaged?
6. Jesus spells out God's plan for us in Matthew 28:18-20. What is that plan?
7. What sort of things do people do under the influence of a sudden and intense fear?
8. Can you identify with Jesus's complete trust in God, even to the point of death? (see on this Philippians 1:19-24 and 2:17-18)
9. Do you see the proclamation of the gospel and the extension of the kingdom of God's righteousness as the same thing or do they differ? If the latter, how do they differ?
10. Do you think God wants the church to be a "ruling will" in Oroville? If so, how do you see that coming about?