Text: Luke 23:13-25

**Introduction**

You know the pictures that are really two in one. If you look at them one way you see two faces. If you look at them another you see a cup? There are a bunch of different ones. Most of them if you look long enough or have someone explain it to you, you can see both. But there are people who can only see one image or the other. And I’ve never really heard a good explanation for the perception difference.

**Text**

Pilate in the gospels is a bit like one of the pictures.

In one view – a very pragmatic view – it is hard not to feel for the guy. He has a firm grasp of what is going on before him. He knows that Jesus is innocent. He knows that the only reason Jesus has been brought to him is envy and fear. Envy of the fame he now has with the people. Fear of what he might use that fame for. He also knows that there isn’t much to fear from the man. Luke first plays it out with Herod attempting diplomatic maneuvers. “Oh, he’s a Galilean? Send him to Herod.” But Herod is just as much of a fox and passes the monkey back up the ladder. “Thank you Pilate. I always wanted to see this wonder worker. But he was arrested in Jerusalem. Not my jurisdiction.” Then Luke plays Pilate as the no nonsense Roman. “Look, I did not find this man guilty. Neither did Herod. He doesn’t deserve death. I’ll punish him and release him.” As we say today, “The process is the punishment.” He’s been beat and humiliated. I’ll whip him a little. And he’ll slink off. But the temple establishment won’t have it. Give us Barabbas. And Pilate is cornered. He’s used every trick. He’s down to consequential actions. “I will release him.” But the crowd – I think we’d call it a rent-a-mob today, astroturf, takes it up a pitch and demands that Jesus be crucified. It takes a strong man to stand in front of mob and tell them they are wrong. Pilate tried. “But their voices prevailed.”

But then there is the other view. Pilate is the living embodiment of Roman law. This is the best that mankind has ever produced. And Pilate, sword to uphold that, is honor bound to rule correctly. He should release Jesus. That fact that he considers beating an innocent man is the first crack. If you’ll beat an innocent man to make it all go away. You will crucify him too. And the deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that justice gave.

**Application**

It is amazing to me how in the course of one lifetime things can change. If you had asked 12 year old Mark, he’d have been pretty sure that American Jurisprudence would not have caved. That the US was a nation of laws. The last five years have disabused me of that view. And maybe it was always so. Law was always a nice cover for the machinations of power. And power can always be reduced to the mob. The mob can’t really rule in the long term, but the mobs voice on any given day can prevail.

Maybe you still have a bit more faith in our institutions. My point here isn’t to disabuse you of that. I envy you.

But my point is nod toward our true hope. Jesus in Luke says nothing after telling the Chief Priests what they wanted to hear. “Are you then the son of God? You say that I am. What further do we need to hear.” Jesus goes silent. Pilate argues for him. Herod in his actions argues for him. The LAW argues for him. But Jesus himself is silent. Because Jesus’ hope is not in the best that we can offer. Jesus is not despairing. Silence can often be despair. But that’s not what this is. Jesus knows that his fate is in his father’s hands. His fate is handed over the justice of the Father. And the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

Our justification is not done by our testimony. It is not done by our works. It is not done by the law. Our justification comes from the LORD. The LORD who is great in his steadfast love toward us.

Even when steeples are falling – or institutions – or pictures that we one saw so clearly shift. Our case is not entrusted to them. We too can have a quiet confidence. All things work for the good of the people of God. Our case rests with Christ who has already justified us.