I once heard a sermon where the main evidence for what the priest was asserting came from the way he believed Jesus had intoned the statement on which he was preaching. In other words, the sermon was not about the actual words Jesus spoke but was rather about the tone of voice he believed Jesus had used when he spoke them. It was a pretty nice slight of hand and can be a fairly tempting way of going about sermon preparation because you can just kind of do whatever you want. Certainly, it would be nice to have a recording of many of the passages in the Bible because as we know voice inflection communicates a tremendous amount and today in a small exchange between Jesus and Pontius Pilate it could really help. The snippet reads, “Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’" I would like to know what Pilate’s tone of voice was when he asked, “What is truth?” Did he say it in a tone that indicated he was very interested in learning what Jesus meant? Did his tone convey exasperation because Jesus had not really been helping him decide what to do next? Was it sarcastic and dismissive of Jesus believing that there was no such a thing as truth or that Jesus was incapable of discerning what truth was? We simply do not know what Pilate was thinking or feeling when he asked the question. And while I would like to know, I also think there is something appropriate in being confused. I say this because much of what happens on Good Friday is a little confusing and murky and so Pilate adding to the murk seems to be in the spirit of the day.

Here is why I say things are a little murky. Certainly, we know what ultimately happens but how it all came to be is a little opaque. We know the chief priests and pharisees did not like Jesus but how exactly they went from not liking him to wanting him dead is not all that clear. We know Judas had disagreements with Jesus but how this led to his betrayal is again not terribly clear. Pilate spends much of his time saying that Jesus seems innocent but at some point decides to go ahead with the crucifixion. So, to ask a modified version of Pilate’s question, what is the truth of today? How did Jesus go from the Last Supper to hanging dead on a cross in less than twenty-four hours? Well, as with the tone of Pilate’s question I don’t know but here are some thoughts.

My son Auggie was doing a paper on conspiracies for one of his classes and decided to write about John F. Kennedy assassination conspiracies. One of the questions he had to answer concerned the motivation of people who created the theories. He answered that the theories proliferated because people do not want to believe someone as significant as John F. Kennedy was killed by someone as insignificant as Lee Harvey Oswald. And while I partially understand the motivation I also know that evil is often done by very boring and insignificant people, what Hannah Arendt dubbed the banality of evil. Evil is often not grandiose nor even incredibly well thought out, it just kind of takes on a life of its own. What is the truth of today’s events? Was jealousy involved? Probably. What about fear? There was most definitely some of that. How about some bureaucratic blame shifting? Certainly, that is there as well. But these petty things also happen in our everyday lives and we do not end up killing the Son of God. But just because under normal circumstances things do not go quite so wrong, does that make our pettiness any better? We want to think that it was something very important which killed Jesus because that sort of gets us off the hook, but the fact of the matter is it was series of pedestrian sinfulness. As was noted, what pushed it over the edge is not completely clear, but we do know that the motivations for it were things that are fairly typical in your average Junior High. And while there are many things we can take from Good Friday, one of them is for us to stop it. Stop the petty jealousies and the fear and instead find our rest in God. We can stop participating in the same mundane sinfulness that today ends up with God being nailed to a tree. I realize it is depressing to realize that the people who killed Jesus were not all that different from us, but with God’s help we don’t have to be like them. We can pray that we are able to emerge from the murkiness of this day and live in the clarity and beauty of God’s love. I want to end with the prayer attributed to St. Francis and ask that this could be true for all of us.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.