

Sunday, March 15, 2026 Fourth Sunday in Great Lent Worship Sermon

“Behold, This Man” Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Isaiah 50:4–9; John 19:1–16

❶ **【Behold, this is the man】**

Today, let’s talk about Jesus standing trial.

Jesus was arrested in the middle of the night and brought to Pilate’s palace at dawn. Pilate questioned Jesus about many things but could find no fault in Him. So he had Jesus flogged. The soldiers placed a crown of thorns on Jesus’ head, dressed Him in a purple robe to make Him look like a king, and mocked Him by slapping Him and shouting, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Pilate thought that if he showed the Jews the helpless figure of Jesus, they would withdraw their complaint, so he brought Jesus out before them. “Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said, ‘Here is the man’” (verse 5).

● “Behold, this is the man” is “Ecce Homo” in Latin. It is a famous phrase. Pastor Yasushi Yuki wrote the lyrics for the fourth verse of Hymn 21, No. 280, titled “In the Manger,” which includes the line, “Behold this man; in him, incomparable love has been revealed,” and this phrase is used there as well. Pastor Yasushi Enomoto wrote a book on the life of Christ titled “Ecce Homo (Behold This Man),” but he passed away before completing it. Twenty-five chapters of the manuscript remained, and they have now been published. At the beginning of the book, Pastor Megumi Enomoto writes, “It is nothing other than looking at myself through this very person (Christ).”

Therefore, we too must look upon this helpless Jesus, crowned with thorns. For it is by seeing this that we come to understand our true selves.

❷ **【The Sins of the High Priests (Religious Leaders)】**

Then the chief priests shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” (verse 6). Why did the chief priests hate and fear Jesus so much? It was because Jesus was a man who had never committed a single sin. They had never seen anyone like him before. The chief priests feared that the appearance of Jesus—the only one who was righteous and pure—would expose their own hypocrisy. When Adam sinned in Eden, he realized he was naked—that is, that he was weak and poor—and covered himself with fig leaves. Since then, humans have adorned themselves with all sorts of things. The chief priests covered themselves with religious righteousness, and the scribes covered themselves with knowledge. Adornment is a way of hiding one’s true self; it is a form of deception. Before the true God, we must stand in our true form, naked. No excuse or adornment will hold up.

③ 【The Sin of Pilate (the Politician)】

When Pilate said to Jesus, “I find no basis for a charge against this man” (verse 6), the Jews replied to Pilate, “According to our law, this man deserves to die, because he has claimed to be the Son of God” (verse 7). Upon hearing these words, Pilate was afraid, went back into the governor’s residence, and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” (verse 9). He was not asking about his place of origin. It was a question asking, “Who are you really?” It was Pilate, a pagan, not the Jews, who feared the words “Son of God.” He still possessed a sense of what was right. Pilate had lived his life avoiding anything to do with religion, but suddenly, God had entered his life. Faced with this God, he was forced to give an answer. Yet Jesus could not answer. Even in the Old Testament, it is prophesied, “He did not open his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:7) and “I will make my face like flint” (Isaiah 50:7). Pilate says, “Will you not answer me? Don’t you know that I have the authority to release you or to crucify you?” (verse 10), but Jesus replies, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from God. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” (v. 11), thereby striking fear into Pilate’s heart. Pilate then tried to find a way to release Jesus, but the crowd shouted, “If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king is rebelling against Caesar.” (v. 12) The crowd pressed Pilate, demanding, “Choose between Jesus the King and Caesar the Roman Emperor!” A person cannot serve two masters. It became clear that it was not Jesus who was on trial here, but Pilate himself. If he released Jesus, he would be accused by the Jews, and his position would be jeopardized. Yet he was also afraid of becoming an enemy of Jesus (the Truth). Pilate is caught between a rock and a hard place. He appears to have authority but lacks it; he seems strong but is weak. He cannot do what he believes is right. This is because he feared people more than God. He made people into gods. This, too, is idolatry. And finally, he handed Jesus over to the Jews. This is the sin of a politician. Votes come first; popularity comes first. Authority departs from those who have abandoned God.

④ 【The Sin of the Crowd】

After this, when Pilate said, “Am I to crucify your king?” the chief priests replied, “We have no king but Caesar” (verse 15). They, who had accused Jesus of “blasphemy,” did not acknowledge God as their King but confessed the emperor as their King. Here, their true nature was finally revealed. In other words, they were exposed as idol worshippers. They were seeking a god (an idol) who would do their bidding.

●Right now, the Trump administration in the United States and the Netanyahu administration in Israel are jointly attacking Iran. It seems that, for them, power is everything. The same is true of Russia. Everyone is striving for a strong America,

a strong Israel, and a strong Russia. However, Paul says, “We preach Christ crucified. to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23), thereby stating that Christianity proclaims the weak Messiah who was crucified. For the Jews, a Messiah who was crucified and killed is unacceptable. This is evident from the taunts people hurled at Jesus on the cross: “Messiah, King of Israel, come down from the cross now. If we see that, we’ll believe in him” (Mark 15:32). The Jews were seeking a strong Messiah. Israel has not changed, then or now. When they saw Jesus, covered in wounds and wearing a crown of thorns, a deep sense of disappointment must have arisen among the Jews.

⑤ **【Acknowledging One's True Sinfulness and Standing Before God】**

Having discussed this far, do you see how, before Christ, the masks of the high priest, Pilate, and the Jews were stripped away one by one, exposing their true, deceitful nature? That was the reason God remained silent. It was to expose human sin. God is truth in His very being. God is like a mirror; simply by being there in silence, He reflects the true nature of humanity. It is just as the genuine Mona Lisa, simply by being placed there in silence, exposes the countless fake Mona Lisas. The genuine article makes no claims. It needs no proof. The Jews saw the weak Messiah who appeared before them and rejected Him. If they had loved the truth, they would have loved Christ. But they loved darkness rather than light. They loved falsehood rather than truth. They loved not God, but idols that would do their bidding. That in itself is already judgment. (John 3:19)

● When I was in college, I attended the Unification Church. There, I was taught that Jesus’ crucifixion was a failure. But no matter how I looked at it, it didn’t seem like a failure to me. That’s because, no matter how much people cursed, hated, and mocked Jesus, and even crucified him, nothing but words of love and forgiveness came from his lips. On the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them.” This is something no ordinary human being could do. When others criticize us, anger, hatred, and a desire to judge well up within us. No matter how much we try to endure or put on a brave face, those evil thoughts inevitably surface. This is who we are; this is our true nature. But God did not create human beings to be like that. He did not create us to harbor evil thoughts, commit sins, speak words that hurt others, kill people, and eventually die ourselves. Therefore, this is an abnormal state that should not exist. Only Jesus is the true human being, the Son of God, and the One who lived the life God desires. That is why the cross could not be seen as a failure. On the cross, I saw the true image of a human being.

Christ, our God, remains silent even today, humbling Himself as He watches to see how people treat Him and the people He has created. It is said that American soldiers entered the homes of Muslims, tore up and burned the Qur’an, and drew

crosses on the walls. How sinful this is! It is an act that brings shame upon God. God must be grieving. God's silence is an act of mercy, intended to help you recognize your sins and repent. It is so that you may not perish at the Last Judgment. Then, without mercy, His mouth will condemn your sins. Oh, may we become people who truly know our sins. And may we give glory to the cross of the merciful Christ.