

Kingdom Not of this World

John 18: 33-38

I'm sure as you entered into worship this morning, and began perusing the bulletin for this Sunday, you might have been a little worried that we as the church staff had finally lost it. After all, we started out with an Easter hymn. Our communion hymn is from the season of Advent, and the rest of it...well, it really is a little bit of everything.

No, you can take heart. As always there is a method to our madness. You see, this Sunday is Christ the King Sunday. It is end of our liturgical church year, a Sunday where we proclaim Jesus King of Kings while we anticipate the coming of his Kingdom.

Yes, I know how odd that sounds but what can I say? As people of faith, let's face it. We are odd people. Paul even talks about how the world will call us foolish because we worship a Savior who was crucified, how the world will think we have lost what little sanity we may have had in the first place because time after time, we face the pain and hurt of this world, and gladly proclaim that light and love will have the last word. No wonder the world doesn't know what to do with us.

Because while the rest of the world has moved on to Christmas and beyond, we are still waiting...waiting for Advent, waiting for Christmas, waiting for

Epiphany. While the rest of the world has moved on, we are still proclaiming Jesus King of Kings while awaiting his Kingdom to come here on Earth as it is in heaven.

That's why this text is so perfect for Christ the King Sunday. John captures the world's limited duality of thought while showing there is always so much more going on behind the scenes.

Let me explain: Normally, we read this text on Maundy Thursday and only on Maundy Thursday. We read it through the lens of betrayal and crucifixion. But as always, with the Gospel of John, there are many layers to his stories. Our text is the second of seven conversations Pilate has during Jesus' trial. He goes back and forth between the religious leaders and Jesus, trying to wrap his mind around what is exactly happening in that moment. With each conversation, he becomes more and more confused and frustrated until he finally washes his hands of it all.

In this conversation, Pilate is trying to figure out exactly what is the charge being brought against Jesus. After all, what has he really done? Flipped a few tables in the Temple? Called out the religious leaders on their hypocrisy? These aren't really punishable crimes within the Roman court of law. Sure, Jesus may have disturbed the peace but Rome can't put him to death for any of that.

However, if and only if Jesus claims to be a king, than Rome can do something. This would be a direct threat to the Emperor because as we may

remember from our history lessons, in Rome and all its territories, the Emperor was Lord and King, a representation of a god here on Earth. So Pilate sees a way out and asks Jesus directly, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Now, as we have come to learn, Jesus never answers a question directly, especially in the Gospel of John. There are always metaphors, parables and other questions as Jesus’ responses. And this time is no different. Jesus answers Pilate’s question with another question. So Pilate tries again. Jesus again responds with another supposed cryptic answer. Eventually Pilate gets so frustrated that he leaves, going back again to the religious leaders to find out what exactly they want him to do.

This could easily be the end of the conversation between Pilate and Jesus. But we know how the story ends. Somehow, some way, a charge is brought against Jesus and he is crucified. So there must be something we are missing that John wants us to see and it has to do with this kingdom language.

This is the second time John uses this language of king or kingdom in a conversation with Jesus. The first time was Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. In both of these instances, John is playing on the meaning of the words to expand the conversation beyond just what the world sees and understands.

In this conversation from our text today, Pilate is using the language of this world to describe what makes a king, what makes up a successful kingdom. He is

using the language of power and might, using the language of wealth and control through force. He doesn't understand any other way. He doesn't know any other way of operation or relationship beyond power and might which is why Pilate cannot and does not understand Jesus' answers. Jesus is telling Pilate everything he needs to know if Pilate would just open his eyes, open his ears and experience a different type of kingdom.

Because when Jesus answers Pilate's questions, he is not being cryptic. Jesus is simply using the language of the Kingdom of God. This is a kingdom not of this world. It is a kingdom where the rich will be made poor, and the poor will be made rich. It is a kingdom where the strong will be made weak, and the weak made strong. When Jesus talks about his kingdom, he is simply speaking in the language which reflects the very character of our God. He is speaking in the language of love, justice, mercy and peace. Rome and all the world powers cannot and do not understand this type of language to describe a kingdom. It is not in their vocabulary. Because it goes against everything this world uses to define success, to define power, to define being King of Kings and Lord of Lords. For in the Kingdom of God, the king will be crowned with a crown of thorns. His throne will be placed at an ordinary table where all are invited to come and partake.

Jesus does not fit the mold of a worldly king. He speaks of lilies of the field and birds of the air as his subjects. He recognizes a woman pouring oil upon his

feet as an offering worthy of a king. Jesus does not fit the mold of a worldly king because Jesus did not come to this world to overtake or overthrow. Jesus came to this world so that all would know, so that all would know the amazing grace of a God who loves us so much that God gave God's only Son so that we might live. Jesus came so that all would know the peace that thrives when the lion lays down with the lamb. Jesus came so that all would know that there is another way to live and be... a way that invites all to come to the table and be embraced as a Beloved Child of God, another way which speaks to the light residing in all our hearts, another way calling us to shine this light in the face of the darkness of this world so all may know the darkness does not have the power to overcome the light. Jesus came so that all might be born of God because one day soon, the Kingdom of God will be here on earth just as it is in heaven.

Or let me say it another way....As Disciples of Christ, we aren't really comfortable with this kingdom language to describe Jesus. We may say things like King of Kings and Lord of Lords but we usually save that for Easter. We really don't use this kingly language the rest of the year. We would rather talk about Jesus being a man who shows us a different way. We would rather talk about the human side of Jesus because this makes him real. This makes him relatable. This makes it easy for us to wrap our minds around the mysteries of life.

However this is only part of who Jesus is. This is only part of the faith conversation. We are only seeing part of the picture. There is so much more going on behind the scenes, so much more to Jesus than simply being a man who did nice things for people while he was here on earth. He is a King of Kings who turned this world upside down, who overcame the grave, and brought us all new life. He is Lord of Lords who time and time, looks in the face of this world and says you will not have the last word. Jesus is our Lord and Savior who came so that all might live life abundantly in the grace and love of God.

And here is something else to think about when it comes to language and words we use to describe Jesus. As Disciples, in our reluctance to proclaim just exactly who Jesus is for us, who Jesus is to us, others are filling in the gaps. And they are filling in these gaps in with dangerous and hurtful theology and practices. They have no problem claiming the authority to decide who is in and who is out. They have no qualms in saying that if we don't believe just exactly as they believe than we are wrong. With this mantle of authority which they claim, they offer no grace. They offer no mercy. They ignore the life changing power of God's love. They actually offer up a Jesus who is a direct opposite of the Jesus we have come to know and experience in our lives. As Disciples of Christ, our understanding after reading the sacred text is that Jesus welcomed the sinner and the saint alike, that Jesus cared for those on the margins, our understanding is that Jesus

challenged the very systems which perpetuate injustice in our world.

As Disciples of Christ, in our reluctance to proclaim Jesus Christ as our King, others have stepped in to do so, preaching a theology of hate and division which has led to more and more brokenness, more and more hurt. This has led to more and more people turning away from the very life changing life giving transformative presence of God in their midst, something that goes against our very nature as Disciples who proclaim all are welcome.

So maybe since we are starting a new year, it is time we changed the conversation. Maybe it is time to embrace our foolishness and loudly proclaim that our King of Kings wears a crown of thorns and sits on a throne beside ordinary people. Maybe it is time we as his subjects in grace and love work together to bring about a kingdom not of this world for all of God's people.

After all, there is always a method to our madness. Just ask our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Amen.