

Proper 29

Today is the end of our liturgical year. Christ the King Sunday. My Markan scholars we started last January -We traveled thru the seasons, living into the life of Jesus, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and now ending the longest season, Ordinary Time. We have heard about relationships Jesus nurtured -healing of Jairus' daughter interrupted by the courageous bleeding woman, the Syro-phonician woman begging Jesus to cast out the demons possessing her daughter...

But today, we leave these healing stories as we did last week with Samson's sermon about temple mount - no stone left unturned, to consider the truths of God's Kingdom & Christ as our King. We have begun a journey into the apocalyptic foreshadowing of Jesus' death and only in this way can we understand the gift of Christ's birth.

So gospel lesson this morning is not what we want - not a healing encounter with Jesus.

It is an ugly, scary encounter between a tyrant, Pontius Pilate governor of Judea sent from Rome by Emperor Tiberius and Jesus.

Pilate: ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?

Jesus: Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?

Pilate: I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?

Jesus: My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

Pilate: So you are a king?

Jesus: 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.

But the most important line is not included in our liturgy verse 38- the next response of Pilate to Jesus:

Pilate says to Jesus. " WHAT IS TRUTH?"

THIS is where we are this morning- the midst of an apocalyptic journey thru advent- this morning the Good Friday story - the trial - is a time now of pausing, praying, **seeking the truth of God's Kingdom that Jesus was and is offering.**

Pilate says to Jesus. "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

First we have to understand power.

Pilate's kingdom was built on power acquired from Rome, Emperor Tiberius- that is the Gospel context. All were subjects of the Roman Empire, subjected to brutality even death if one did not obey the commandments of the Roman Emperor.

When Jesus calls his disciples, lowly fishermen of Galilee, a tax collector at the border in Capernaum, Mary of Magdala all who left their village to follow Jesus- these simple everyday working people like you and me were offered a new kind of "kingdom" a new kind of leader whose power he claimed was "not from this world."

What is the truth? Pilate asked

In 1st century Palestine, Pontius Pilate grappled with his own need for power- he was not what we **might** think - a Pilate who wanted to give Jesus back to his followers.

The historical truth is Pilate was brutal murderer who would eliminate anyone who challenged his authority. The study of Pilate is for another day, but suffice it to say this morning in the context of this courtroom drama that **Pilate's authority as governor of Judea came from the Roman emperor.**

What is truth? Pilate asked

The truth then, the truth now, is that Christ the King Sunday liturgy is about this awesome contrast in power.

**Pilate's power came from Rome.
Jesus' power came from God.**

Jesus' kingship power - is a deeper spiritual truth- Jesus kingship power is for an eternal kingdom- a kingdom lived not as life of subjugation that Pilate demands — but a life lived in abundance - lived into a new creation.

And abundant life, new creation, is founded on the love and grace of God. Non violent, Non brutal, built on the **tenants of the greatest commandment** “ to love thy neighbor as I have loved you. “

What is truth?

That we are part of a larger reality - God is our beginning our middle and our ending.

“I am the alpha and the omega says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

And we must shape our lives to **not** listen to false prophets that act as fear mongers - preaching that the end of time is near.

No!

We must shape our lives listening to God’s voice of love and grace, sovereignty that **was and is and will be forever.**

What is truth?

In 2019, Fleming Rutledge gave the graduation address at Virginia Theological Seminary. I fell in love with this writer and theologian, Fleming’s words then and today are rich, full of grace about the truth that **Christ our King is calling us to be his witness in the world.**

“ Why are things so bad in the world? Why is there so much evil and suffering? Fleming warns. God is putting the pressure on us.

Anything we can do, anything at all, Fleming believes, however small or large, and deed of kindness or generosity or courage that sees the load of someone else or beings truth and justice to light is a sign of the advent of the one who is and who was and who is to come the almighty.

(Fleming Rutledge, ” Means of Grace: A Year of Weekly devotions.” 242-43)

What is truth?

We must be faithful people who listen to Jesus, our shepherd of love. Like a shepherd leading his sheep. You understand this voice as a recognition of love. I prefer the (The Wycliffe Bible translation)

“Each [man] that is of truth, heareth my voice.”

When my youngest son Walker was four, he was lost in the crowd at his older brother's football game. The details of the day are for another homily, but suffice it to say, I went ballistic. Crying, sobbing, pleading with people around me to help find my son. But when Walker heard my crying voice, he pushed his little self thru the throngs of people leaving the stadium to run into my arms. Precious Walker knew my voice.

Maybe this is a silly sentimental story, but I go to it often when I am distracted and do not stop and listen to what God is saying to me. 2 years ago I was reminded such a shepherd's leading when I returned to my cottage in Dodoma Tanzania. My front porch overlooks wide expansive pasture land, where early morning & again late afternoon, I watch boys lead their goat herds with only the wagogo cry" bucenia" "come". And the goats grazing, look up and seamlessly follow the command back home.

Jesus's voice, when I choose to listen, is my shepherd of love.

What is truth?

Some theologians call this day New Year's eve. The last nite before the new liturgical year. And I like this. Because this means I can have resolutions for things I have left undone, a chance to hear anew my shepherd King. A chance in this new season and year accept the truth that God's Kingdom is built on love. Pilate could not. But we can.

What do I wish for you on this new year's eve, Christ the King Sunday?

That as you approach the first Sunday of advent next week, you will pause, pray *daily* and *deeply* from **your heart seeking this truth:**

Christ is the King of God's eternal Kingdom whose power is built on love that was and is and will be forever.

That is the truth.

