

Sermon: Advent 3 / Christ the King

The Rev. Mike Wernick

November 25, 2018

Year B

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Psalm 132:1-13

Revelation 1:4b-8

John 18:33-37

Today is the day when we celebrate the Reign of Divine Love... but we call it Christ the King Sunday... because of Jesus' gender... and the imperialistic tone of the word *reign*... and while today's sermon is not partisan... it may be somewhat political... in what I say... you may hear the politics of the Gospel... because today's passage ends with Jesus telling Pilate that he came into the world to testify to the truth... in v. 37... Jesus affirms that everyone who belongs to the truth... has listened to his voice... in v. 38 which is not part of today's passage... Pilate asks Jesus... *What is truth*...

Political sedition fell under the jurisdiction of the Roman courts... and Pilate's interrogation of Jesus' political claims... highlights Roman sensitivity to any threat... that Messianic hopes might pose to their governance... but Pete Peery... Pastor of First Presbyterian Church Asheville... says that while this passage is called The Trial Before Pilate... it might better be called... Pilate on Trial... because as Peery writes... Pilate is trapped in fear... as the local representative of the greatest world power at that time... Pilate is charged with maintaining order in Judea... he is charged with keeping the peace... Pilate doesn't really consider Jesus a threat to that rule... he tells the Jewish authorities that he can find no reason to condemn him... but he is concerned that if he doesn't give the Jewish leaders what they want... there may be trouble... and he's concerned that if there's trouble... Rome will question his ability to rule... and he may face some dire consequences... so Pilate taunts Jesus with the power he has to release him... or crucify him... and so he asks political questions... to try and preserve his own power...

Just who do you think you are... are you the King of the Jews... My kingdom is not from this world... So you are a King...

And Jesus responds not with a political question... but with a relationship question... inviting Pilate to be transparent... to utter the truth of his own life... *Do you ask this on your own... or did others tell you about me...* and in v. 36... when Jesus says... *if my kingdom were from this world... my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over...* what he means is... they'd fight the way you do... using violence to get their way... instead of seeking the peace through justice... that I offer... and when Jesus says... *everyone who belongs to the truth... listens to my voice...* he is presenting himself to Pilate as the Good Shepherd...

If we followed a four-week Advent... today would be the last day of the church year... in a few weeks... the infant Jesus will be born in the manger... and in 51 weeks... at the end of another year... this infant will become the King of all Creation... we cannot fully comprehend this King... this King is more than our minds can fathom... because this King is also the king of the stars and planets which lie 13 billion light years away... the origins of his Kingdom... described in John 1:1... are located outside of time and space... and the truth about his reign... the truth which Pilate can't quite grasp... is that Jesus redefines what kingship looks like... it is in opposition to those human institutions which use any kind of power... to oppress the innocent...

The Rev. Mike Kinman writes... to John's readers... the Romans are not only their oppressors... they have destroyed the Temple... the place where God resided... Jesus' assertion that his kingdom is not of this world is a bold statement that the Roman authorities have no authority over him... because God now resides in a place the Romans cannot touch... in the community of the faithful... John's community... they are at once in this world... but not of this world... followers of the one who is the way... the truth... and the life...

But we have all heard stories... of someone taking a stand... a position for or against something... only to later retract... or modify what they wrote... or said... saying I didn't mean what you think I said... you took it the wrong way... what I really meant was... [fill in the blank]... and certainly... people can grow and learn and change... and be formed more and more into the image of God... but often... maybe most of the time... we know why do they do this... it's out of the fear of losing power... and prestige... and authority... as Pilate did... or perhaps to enhance them... and often... maybe most of the time... we can tell which is which...

In the fall of 2005... John Edwards sat down... nearly three years after he voted to support the war in Iraq... and scrawled three simple words... I WAS WRONG... increasingly filled with regret... he concluded that the three-word confession would be the right way to start a Washington Post op-ed... admitting his vote was a mistake... but when the draft came back from his aides in Washington... Edwards' acknowledgement was gone...

Determined... the senator reinserted the sentence... again a draft came back from Washington... and again the sentence had been taken out. "We went back and forth, back and forth," Edwards told NEWSWEEK. "They didn't want me to say it. They were saying I should [emphasize] that I'd been misled." The opening sentence remained. "That was the single most important thing for me to say," he recalls. "I had to show how I really felt." Edwards' aides felt afraid that their boss would lose power... and so they altered his authentic... patriotic message...

The online Merriam Webster Dictionary defines *patriotism* simply as "love for or devotion to one's country." And it defines *nationalism*... as "loyalty and devotion to a nation... exalting it above all others... and placing primary emphasis on the promotion of its culture and interests... as opposed to those of other nations."

When I was in public school... we learned about Manifest Destiny... according to The Encyclopedia of American History... by Richard Morris... the earliest known use of this term... attributed to John O'Sullivan... was in a magazine editorial... which claimed that foreign governments were attempting to prevent Texas from becoming part of the United States... in order to check... *the fulfillment of our manifest destiny... to overspread the continent... allotted by Providence... for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions...* and its later and first use in Congress... was by Massachusetts Speaker of the House Robert Winthrop on January 3, 1846... when he referred to... *the right of our manifest destiny to spread over this whole continent...*

Ask the First Nation peoples... what they think of Manifest Destiny... which not only took resources from their land... but took them from their land... sometimes by genocide... so there'd be no one left to ask questions... ask the Aborigines... ask the Canaanites... ask any tribal people who have been invaded and conquered... by people who conveniently claimed it was God's will...

Remember... God's story... is our story... and as Bp. Satterlee wrote... Jesus and Pilate are [still] staring each other down... as the Kingdom of God goes head to head with the kingdoms of the world... Pilate represents the Roman Empire... greed... status... ruthlessness... hate... rule by intimidation and power... and the willingness to use it violently... just ask the family of Jamal Khashoggi...

In Christ... we learn that God is in control... but not as a ruthless tyrant ruling by force and intimidation... we learn that although God's kingdom is resistible... God's kingdom is invincible...

There is a well established and pervasive belief... called the Prosperity Gospel... which whispers the lies of Manifest Destiny... it seduces us in believing that if I am successful... and wealthy... and powerful... then I am beloved of God... and if I am one of the people at the intersection... or under a bridge... or on Division St... then God has

forsaken me... but more and more... I am increasingly convinced... that it's we who have forsaken them...

And the sad truth... is that the good works that every church or mosque or synagogue does... yes... this good work... is needed... but it is also a band-aid... what we need are systemic cures... and cures cannot come from the practices of the Roman Empire... they must come from the kingdom which transcends them...

In 1 Samuel 8... the Israelites asked old Samuel for a King... God told Samuel that they had not rejected him... but they rejected God... and God warned them of the consequences of having a king... in John 6:15... when Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king... he withdrew again to the mountain by himself... on Palm Sunday... Jesus is heralded as King... the truth is... we want kings... but we don't want to do what they say... we want leaders... but we want to criticize them when it's convenient for us...so what is truth... Jesus is Truth... that is and was and is to come...

Our work... is to invite that Truth into our hearts...

Mike+