

His Kingdom

John 18:33-37

This is the day the church proclaims that Jesus is king and his kingdom is coming. The truth of this testimony, however, is not self-evident; thus many still ask, "Who is Jesus?" and "Where is his kingdom?" During Jesus' time and in our era, we are looking for some powerful figure that lives in a palace and commands obedience. We want someone like Saul, the first king of Israel, or David who unified the nation of Israel, or Solomon, or Hezekiah, or one of the great Israelite or Judean kings of their past history. In our lesson, Pilate questioned Jesus, face to face, and Jesus made astonishing statements about his kingship and realm.

Remember in our scripture Jesus was on trial. In a trial arraignments involve the formal reading of a criminal complaint that spells out the basic facts and legal reasons that those filing the charges believe are sufficient to support a claim against another person or entity. This is done in the presence of defendants to inform them of the charges against them. The accused is expected to enter a plea that answers the charges being made against him or her. The normal plea is either "Guilty" or "Not guilty." Our scripture does not follow the norm.

Jesus' opponents brought him from the house of Caiaphas to the Roman praetorium, called the Antonia fortress, built along the northern wall of the temple complex. They wanted Pilate to condemn Jesus; Pilate wanted them to handle the matter; however they refused and said this was Roman's job. Pilate then entered the praetorium, "called" Jesus to him, and questioned him there (v. 33). Pilate's first question addressed Jesus' identity as king of the Jews. The title

of "king" was loaded with political—insurrectional—meaning for the Romans, who had little tolerance for any king but Caesar. Pilate asserted his Gentile status and revealed no personal interest in Jesus' status among the Jews. He cares nothing for Jewish kings and messiahs. As this arraignment continued, Jesus spoke of the origin of his kingdom and the distinction between that kingdom and the world. Jesus responded that the kingdom to which Jesus belongs, is not a political reality but a theological one. Ultimately, Jesus and his followers belong to a kingdom that is not earthly bound. Jesus and his followers belong to the truth. Gerard S. Sloyan writes that the words "king" and "kingship" touch on a different sphere from that of this world. Jesus gives the words new meanings. Pilate understands "king" and "kingship" in earthly terms. Jesus redefines "king" and "kingship" to belong to what Sloyan refers to as the "sphere of belief in him who came in to the world to testify to the truth." This sphere of belief occurs among all those who both hear and heed Jesus' voice. Proclaiming the truth, being the truth, and even belonging to the truth are what make Jesus a king. His kingdom—his nation—is not defined by earthly terms. Jesus comes from and belongs to God's kingdom.

Bruce J. Malina writes that one of the greatest challenges for Americans in reading the Bible is to understand the difference between the U.S. emphasis on the individual and the Mediterranean emphasis on the community. Malina explains that in the world of the New Testament, a person did not think of himself or herself as an individual who acts alone, regardless of what others think and say. Rather, the person is "ever aware of the expectations of others, especially significant others, and strives to match those expectations. This is the group-embedded, group-oriented, collectivistic personality, one who needs another simply to know who he or she is."

When Jesus tells Pilate that all who listen to Jesus' voice belong to the truth and are part of his kingdom, he is saying, in Mediterranean fashion, that belonging is less about individual decisions and more about collective participation in a community that transcends the self. He even hints at this for himself when he speaks of being born and coming into the world to testify to the truth. The reign of God is larger than any individual, even Jesus himself.

Surely the kingdom is present wherever Jesus is present. It is present wherever we experience the reign of God through God's invitation, healing, and restoration—but our belonging is not up to each one of us alone. Our belonging is up to God. That is the new reality that Jesus proclaims. That is the new truth to which all of us—the community of those invited, healed, and restored—belong. **Rodger Y. Nishioka**

Jesus' kingship and his messianic mission is to witness to the truth. He was not just speaking in terms of reliability and dependableness; but an unwavering conformity with God's will so that we think in terms of reality and understanding. This truth is something that is done rather than something that is simply believed or thought of.

Although the intellectual understanding of truth is important in helping establish and maintain many social norms, intellectual truth does not fill all of our needs. We are compelled to go beyond merely understanding and making sense and order in our world. We must seek to know God and live as active witnesses on this journey into God. Jesus' life and mission is a model of this for us. In Jesus, we learn that truth is a stimulant for faithful living and witness, rather than only a matter for contemplation. It is something we do.

Last week I watched a Christian movie, *Catching Faith*. The Christian family needed to learn about truth. The son, a high school, football star, had to sit out part of the season because he was caught drinking. The daughter, a hard

working student, had to decide whether she should cheat on an exam in a class in which she was not doing well. The mother was more concerned about the opinions of her friends and neighbors than she was about her family and her faith. What each learned, and therefore, the entire family learned was that truth and faithfulness were what mattered in the kingdom of God when you allow Jesus to be your Lord and King.

The truth Jesus calls us to, in this passage and others, originates in God and not in humanity. This truth is neither relative nor provisional. It is eternal and an intricate part of God's ongoing revelation in our lives and in creation. God truly is a God of love and grace, who wills the blessings of creation in our lives. Jesus said, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (v. 37).

Jesus' kingdom and truth can be transforming if we seek it through obedience that asks us to look deeply into whom we are and what we have become, to try to live into what we can and should be. By looking deeply, we must look at what is right and wrong in our actions and attitudes toward others and within ourselves. This means that we challenge ourselves to look beyond what *we* think to the truth found in God as represented by Jesus. The truth that Jesus represents is found in God, who is love and grace. This means we carry on an intense individual and communal dialogue to help ground ourselves. We do so in private and communal prayer, worship, religious education, meetings, and all the other ways we gather as people of faith as active witnesses in the world.

Ultimately, truth is an essential element in helping us sort through the haze of life. We must be alert, open, and willing to walk into this truth through an obedience that listens wisely, and then encounter truth as the challenge and gift God gives to us through infinite love and grace. **Emilie M. Townes**

On this Sunday, the church proclaims Christ the King. The church announces that it bows only to Jesus the Christ. The church declares that it does not give

allegiance to any other person, principality, or power claiming to be sovereign.

We, like Pilate, can accept or reject Jesus' kingship and kingdom. The choice is ours; in truth, Jesus is the judge and king. **Robert A. Bryant**

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 4:
Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).