

## **Sermon Text – Sunday, November 21, 2021 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

**First Scripture Reading: Daniel 7:9-10. 13-14; Second Scripture Reading: 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Scripture for Message: John 18:33-37**

Of course, we are all familiar with what is going on in the scripture we read. Jesus has been arrested and condemned by the Jewish leaders who have brought Jesus to the Roman authority, Pontius Pilate, they hope he will order Jesus' execution. The Jewish leaders would know that anyone claiming to be a King would be a threat to Roman rule and the status-quo in Judea. Pilate, a good Roman governor, would have no choice but to order Jesus' execution. Therefore, Pilate relates to Jesus what the Jewish leaders had told him about Jesus' infractions. A yes answer from Jesus to the question, "Are you the King of the Jews" would free Pilate to have Jesus executed and would free the Jews from any responsibility – they could all wash their hands of this sordid affair. I just want to add that John's reference to Jews in no way condemns all those of Jewish faith – Jesus was a Jew, John was a Jew.

Jesus however did not let Pilate or the "Jews" off the hook. Although Jesus knew where this question came from, he confronts Pilate, questioning what Pilate himself believes. This turns the tables on Pilate and again he must try to 'trap' Jesus into condemning himself. By asking "What have you done?" Pilate attempts to have Jesus implicate himself in a treasonous plot as he explains his actions.

Jesus responds without directly answering Pilate's question. Pilate does not "listen" he hears only what he wants to hear. He wasn't listening for what Jesus' had to say, he condemned himself by not being open to Jesus words of truth. Jesus testifies truth to the political powers of the time, but they were not able to hear. Pilate could not see the Messiah standing right in front of him – he was blind. But Pilate wasn't looking for a Messiah, he wanted someone to scapegoat and accuse. Pilate wanted something or someone to use to appease the Hebrew leaders and thus avoid conflict. Pilate wanted his truth, not Jesus' truth.

Jesus acknowledges that Pilate does not belong to the truth and in that statement also acknowledges that not everyone will listen. Those that do, well they belong to the true kingdom of God. Those who won't listen are not of the kingdom.

There's something very interesting in Jesus' statement to Pilate. Jesus states, "My Kingdom IS not from this world. . . , my kingdom IS not from here." Jesus' explanation indicates that his kingdom IS, not was, or will be but IS. Jesus also

indicates that those who “listen” to Jesus’ voice belong to a kingdom that IS. This kingdom is already, Jesus established a kingdom with his ministry on earth. Those who listen to Jesus’ voice live in that kingdom – between the already and the not yet. This truth originates with God, not humanity and as such it is eternal - the truth, like the kingdom - IS.

We wonder sometimes why Jesus speaks in such perplexing language. Why can’t he just come out and say exactly what he means? Jesus uses riddles and parables and here speaks in ways that not only confuse Pilate but us as well. Jesus does, however, always get to the point. “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate was not listening and therefore did not belong to the truth.

This is a story that is usually told at Easter, not Thanksgiving – so why now? We are at the last day of the church liturgical calendar hearing the story of the last days of Jesus life on earth. Next Sunday we will begin Advent and look toward the birth of a Savior and the return of a Messiah. Why should we consider this passage more than just a story of an event two-thousand years ago? What is the significance of hearing these words today, at this time of year?

Here we have Jesus proclaiming his kingship to the powers that be. He announces the existence of his kingdom even as he is aware of his pending crucifixion. Jesus tells the world that he IS King but over a kingdom that is not yet fully realized in this world – not yet a part of the earthly realm to be recognized by earthly kingdoms. Jesus holds sway the kingdom that is already present but not yet fully realized. Let those with ears to hear understand his message.

One important thing to note is that Jesus speaks directly to the political powers of the time. Jesus proclaims, “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” He is not outside political realities; he directly confronts them. To be faithful followers of Christ, we cannot ignore or separate ourselves from the actual governing processes that influence the ways persons are treated in our society. It may have been easier for Jesus to ignore the oppressed and the poor, but he did not, he opposed the systems that caused these conditions to exist.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, when Christians around the globe celebrate Jesus’ victory over the powers of evil and death. We celebrate the fact that the war is won, and we are victors. Yet we live in a world that seems to be still at war with the forces of evil, and good rarely seems to be winning. What is the message in this for us, as we struggle to live in a world that seems to be getting darker and more anti-Christian? How do we live in the already and the not

yet? Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom IS, from the other readings this morning we hear a promise of the coming kingdom and a king whose dominion is everlasting. That is what we look toward. God is the Alpha the beginning and the Omega, the end. Today we are at the end of our church year, next week is the beginning and we are with God in the already.

So how do we imagine and make contributions to a kingdom already begun but not yet fully realized? How do we make progress for the voiceless or live into God's household? What are the ways we can imagine living into the already and the not yet? How do we follow Jesus as he speaks truth to the political powers?

His disciples, even after Jesus' death, continued to confront power and oppression. They continued to practice what Jesus taught and this movement continues today. You can read their stories in the book of Acts, how they continued to preach the Good News even when the political authorities punished them and commanded that they stop. Through centuries of persecution Christianity flourishes, today in many countries Christians are persecuted – commanded to stop worshiping – yet they continue to speak truth to the political powers that attempt to silence them.

Have you ever considered how you would live differently if Christ's kingdom were here now? Would your life change, would you look at your neighbor differently? Would you treat creation differently? How would you advocate for or promote justice? How would you resist injustice and oppression? In those final days, the time before everything is made perfect, how would you live knowing what was coming? Would you turn your back on the things that keep people from living out God's promises because that is easier to do, or would you work with your neighbor and testify to the truth about what prevents people from full engagement within society?

We could, in this church, consider what could be done to speak the truth to a world that isn't always listening. We could as a church take God's message of justice, mercy, compassion, grace, and forgiveness to our neighbors. We could envision together what it would look like to live in a kingdom already established but not yet fully realized. This work takes more than one person however, it has to be the work of a congregation! To quote the Rev. Dr. William Barber of the Poor People's Campaign, "We are being called to prophetic vision, vision that comes from revelation by God. Vision and dreams that are not afraid of the enemy, vision and dreams that do not know how to fail or how to give up." Just as Jesus spoke truth about his kingdom to Pilate who was not listening, we must follow Jesus' call. Jesus tells us we belong to the truth – therefore we must

advocate for truth and speak truth to powers and principalities – truth is truth regardless of which side of the political divide we stand. Jesus is truth.

It's interesting to me that the next verse not included in our scripture reading from today is Pilate's response to Jesus saying, "What is truth?" and indeed that is the question we should be asking. What is truth? Could the reason it is left out of our scripture reading today be that we as a society are no longer searching for the truth? Have we stopped expecting our politicians to speak truth? Have we as Christians stopped insisting on the truth from those people who lead in our society, those who lead in our church, and those who govern?

These are dreams and visions of a kingdom that IS – it exists. We are already in the kingdom of God although it is not yet fully realized. Next week we begin a process of looking toward and hoping for a full realization of that kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven. Knowing that as truth, living as if that is true, we can speak our truth with confidence and we can believe in the possibility of real peace on earth as it exists in heaven. It is not some farfetched dream; we can raise our voices with those who already are speaking truth to power. No matter which side of the political aisle we sit on, God's truth exists. The truth Jesus tells Pilate he was born to testify. Indeed Jesus reveals God's truth to all who hear his voice. Jesus' truths are our truths. And a kingdom of God is real; the more confident we are to testify to the truth the closer we come to the wholeness of a kingdom envisioned by God.