

Albany Presbyterian Church November 24th 2024

We have been following the lectionary readings set for this year since I started in April. As you know, the lectionary readings are set in three cycles to read the bible in the church's worship context in three years. This season, which was season B, we have been reading Mark's gospel and occasionally John's, like this morning. It often begins and ends with the coming of the season of Advent, where we remember the coming of Christ, which leads us into the celebration of Christmas. It always ends with the invitation to think about Jesus as Christ, the anointed, Messiah, and King.

Though the Bible mentions Jesus as our King many times, it does so only a few times in the gospels. Firstly, since the Messiah was to be born in the Davidic line, David being the greatest King of Israel, the gospel, like in Matthew and Luke, in the beginning, talks about Jesus the Messiah came as the fulfillment of God's promise to David, referring to 2 Samuel 7, secondly, at the end of the gospel, on the last day in the palace of Pilate, like in John 18 that we read, where Jesus was put on trial before the Roman King who asks Jesus, "Are you the king?"

If you remember, it was not what God had in mind for Israel, the king; God did not plan a king for Israel. But as 1 Samuel 8 says, the people of Israel rejected God and his prophets and wanted a King like all other nations, and God reluctantly granted them the King at the end, but with plenty of warning for most of them will be selfish, oppressive, and ruthless. So, it was with their first King, Saul. Though he was blessed to be the first King of Israel and united the 12 tribes of scattered people of Israel, Saul put himself before anyone else, ignored the prophets who spoke on God's behalf and took great power and wealth for himself. He also took the spoils of war and kept to himself the sacrifices to be offered to God.

It is not that David, the second to Saul as the King, was perfect. He was far from it and did many things that displeased God and the prophet. He killed Uraia and stole his wife, Beersheva, for example. As a king, he lived through many trials and tribulations, especially remembering the two significant threats to his life, firstly by his son Absalom and by King Saul and his sons. Yet, David was blessed by God because He recognizes God as the source of his power and authority; he prayed, worshiped, and obeyed the word of God spoken through the prophets throughout his life; he honored God and believed that his kingdom and power never belong to him but belong to God.

We read from 2 Samuel 23:1- 7, where David reflected on his life in his last days, written in poetry. It speaks of the one who rules over people justly, ruling in fear of God; they are, he said, "like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land." And yet, those who do not rule with justice and in fear of God; he calls them the godless, who are like "thorns that cannot be picked up" and, therefore, "thrown away" and "consumed in fire on the spot." David also recognized that God is the source of all things and blessings, and he remembers the covenant God has made with him, which is ordered in all things and secure, and all his help and his desire to prosper.

Would anything David talks about make sense to those who hold power today?

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," says John Dalberg, the historian, politician, and Writer who writes to a church official when writing about the church history, stating that the power is easily misused or manipulated. So, as we see around us even today, much is happening around us. We all know the Hikoï protest marching into the capital in Aotearoa. Some were for or against the treaty bill, which led to this massive protest. As you know, we also had the Royal Commission of Inquiry that investigated those being abused in the state or religious organization's care,

not to mention the confusing political trends, nationalistic moves, and ethnic conflicts that are rising again in the World.

Those in positions of power, and even if we are not set in such powerful positions, we are to re-examine ourselves, who we are, where we belong, and how we belong.

Jesus says his and our Kingdom is not here. In John 18:36, Jesus says, "My Kingdom is not from this world." In chapter 18, the Jewish authorities brought Jesus to Pilate to be tried for treason. Though they would not come with him to the palace where Jesus was, John says they still wanted to eat the Passover. But they wanted Jesus to be executed.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Philosopher writing from the Prison where he was serving a lifetime sentence for his part in the resistance of Nazi Germany, says, "A king who dies on the cross must be the King of a rather strange kingdom; only those who understand the profound paradox of the cross can also understand the whole meaning of Jesus's assertion: My kingdom is not of this world. He said the cross is death and life, a penalty and a reward, a judgment and justification. Jesus died as self-giving, in which God gives us his righteousness and blessing in exchange for our sins and disobedience. To provide us with life, Jesus gave his life; by raising us from the dead, he will raise us from our death; Christ lives so we may live."

And this King who dies for his people, the King who is a servant to his people, whose unconditional love transforms the life and the world, and whose power is marked by his grace and mercy. The Roman Empire had no reason to be threatened, for Christ the King was with no threat of political or social control or power. And yet, this Kingdom conquered the whole world with his love, sacrifice, and service, overcoming all power and principality.

Jesus says that everyone who belongs to the Kingdom belongs to the truth, and everyone who belongs to the truth will belong to Christ, the King.

One commentator says God was the king ontologically, the anointed one, the Christ or Christos, and the Messiah, the savior, and all in his essence, Jesus was the anointed Messiah and the King. Being the king is not something he did; it is who he is. That is why Jesus replied to Pilate, who asked him what he had done in verse 35 with who he was in verse 37: Jesus said, "You are right in saying, I am a king. In fact, for this reason, I was born, and for this, I came into the world to testify to the truth."

This is important in understanding our faith and belonging to this God; those who know Christ know the truth of Christ, the King. As Jesus said, we belong because we know the truth, and because we know the truth, we belong to this Kingdom. Because we belong, we see the truth. So, what is the truth? Pilate asked. What is that truth? The word truth is in Greek *Aletheia*, which is unconcealed, which was what Jesus taught his disciples about himself throughout his ministry; he revealed who he is and what God wants to do through him; that Jesus is the Messiah, who came to set us free. We know this truth: Christ the King made us the people of his Kingdom through his death and resurrection. We live in a time of rising nationalism. Seeking common ground politically or globally has become the most challenging task. The world is in constant conflict and war, and each country looks to advance its power and influence through war and other means. Many more contentious and divisive issues divide and confuse us, creating doubts and mistrust between people. All these things were what concerned the church back in the 1920s; coming out of the major war and seeing the increase of the threats of war brewing through individualism and nationalism, it was a calling for the church to be united in Christ, so Christ, the King Sunday has been introduced. And so, today, we are invited to reexamine ourselves, recommit to our God, the Christ Jesus, and pray for ourselves and our government, especially those in power.

As Christ says, we live in this world, but we do not belong to this world; instead, we belong to God and God's Kingdom. So, we pray that God reigns on earth and in our hearts. We live in a closer and more

intimate relationship with God, in deeper trust and connection with God. And we pray for a world where God's Kingdom and work for the Kingdom of God come fulfilled here on earth, where all are welcome, loved, and free. And in this, May Christ be the leading light, lighting the morning like the Sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. Amen.