

“Truth”

a sermon by the Reverend Marsha E. Brown,

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John 18: 33-37

Today is the last Sunday of the church year; traditionally called “Christ the King” Sunday. Usually I don’t talk much about Jesus being a King because it is hard for us to identify with the concept of a king and Jesus usually seems to be the antithesis of a King. He was powerless to all the brutal empire around him. And THAT is the point: he is a King in a realm that is not of this world: One which points to God’s truths which are not humankind’s truths. One in which real power is more subtle and harder to do and to understand.

Today’s scripture will be projected for you and it will be read by Bill and Bill. Listen for God’s Word to you in both of these ways. Today’s text is John 18: 33-37.

“Pilate questions Jesus

³³ Pilate went back into the palace. He summoned Jesus and asked, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others spoken to you about me?”

³⁵ Pilate responded, “I’m not a Jew, am I? Your nation and its chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?”

³⁶ Jesus replied, “My kingdom doesn’t originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn’t have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn’t from here.”

³⁷ “So you are a king?” Pilate said.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice." "This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God"

Jesus says, 'Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice.' As a follower of Jesus, we say that we do what he does, try to see people as he did, love unconditionally as he did, act as he did when faced with those who would hurt him or try to diminish his teaching. Do we do that? How easy is it to rest in our judgmental ways- thinking that we are right and others are wrong, assuming that people are up to no good-because of how they look, different or dirty or poorly dressed, or fat, or smokers.....or especially if they are middle-eastern and the women wear a head covering. Fox news should not be coloring our perceptions of people. We should take each person on their own accord without prejudice. We allow fear to taint our perceptions in this world where fear is the aim of terrorists. But fear drives us further from each other. And only by connecting with each other will we begin to heal this hurting world. We are ONE.....even in our diversity- even when we are threatened by some-- we are ONE and we need each other.

Jesus, the powerless immigrant trouble maker who spoke wisdom never before heard was face to face with Pilate-who was also called the 'Son of God'. Pilate thought he had everything, but in fact had nothing. Jesus who appeared to have nothing, in fact had everything. Jesus had plenty of power-just not the 'sword in your face' -kind that made people cower. And Jesus used his power to influence and penetrate our common selfishness and fear of each other. Jesus speaks truth to power about ultimate power. Jesus' witness invites us to take our part in the wise reign of God by living out the truth of that witness.

Where do we hear and see the reign of God in witness and embodiment today?

I was contacted by a group this week to use Jubilee hall for an afternoon. The group is a new one- called “Pay it Forward” of MO. The woman has a connection to members of this church and needed a place to give out Christmas gifts to needy families that they have taken in this year. This group has been formed on Facebook since January and has 800 followers. They post critical needs of families on Facebook and people respond. She has been involved since September and has helped 52 families with furniture and clothing and supplies when they have had a fire. Pretty simple. You tell people of a need and they respond. And lots of them are responding.

People say that there is not hope for our society because people do not go to church like they used to. Well- what I see is a deep hunger for people of all ages to make a difference in their community, even if they do not go to church. In fact, some churches get so mired down in disagreements or inability to change that nothing gets done for people outside their walls. I think that we will be working with ‘Pay It Forward’ more in the future. The organizer will be working with us downstairs this week and we intend to explore what we can do together that we cannot do alone.

You know, God’s name is probably not mentioned in this encounter at Pay it Forward. They may not be religious. But they are doing the kind of work that Jesus told us all to do-maybe more than a lot of people who call themselves religious. My spiritual director says that “God doesn’t need to get the credit for helping people-just do it and watch the Spirit in action.” I have witnessed this fact many times....the Spirit working to bring many people together who simply want to make life better for their neighbors—in short—to love their neighbors....just like Jesus taught us all to do.

All of us have power. Not just Jesus or Pilate in our story today. Most of us don't realize what power we have. Our church has power and a high reputation in this community! WE are the church that receives over 30,000 cans of food from the Ritenour schools –tomorrow morning. Cans that the police departments around us will make into Christmas baskets and then give the rest to the pantry to serve our community for several months. Ritenour School District will again come and video this happening and post it on their website like they did last year. We are known for using our power to help others in many ways. You should all be very proud of the work that many people do here.

Each of you has power to influence this church too. Are we as a church doing what we can and what we are called to do? Try this on as a thought: This last week I had 3 critical situations with people downstairs that a social worker would have been very helpful for. Could we work to provide one to the community that we are growing downstairs? Have you spoken the truth God has given to you to share with other church members or community members? We are all a part of the whole-each voice is needed to hear God's call most clearly. In fact, our Presbyterian heritage says that that is why we work in groups- so that God's word to each of us will help guide the whole group.

There is a story about a man who was stopped by a security guard as he walked down the street. The guard asked him, "Who are you and what is your business here? Startled by the question, the man paused a moment before asking the guard what he was paid to perform such a duty as this. He offered to pay twice the amount if the guard would come work for him. ' But what would I need to do to earn such a large sum? The guard asked. The man answered, "Every time you see me, I want you to ask me, "who are you and what is your business here?"

I hope that as we go into this new church year, we are all listening to God and speaking God's truth to each other and to the world. "We all have a long way to go still to hear the truth, to speak the truth, to become more in tune with who God is and who we are. Day by day, year by year, we either grow more generous of heart, less fearful of change, more aligned with love, or we do not. Moving now into the year ahead, beginning the journey once more, who will we become? What is our business here?"¹ Amen.

¹ Kaly McClurg John, Ordinary time B, Inward/Outward