

Sermon 11-20-22

Heather Harriss preaching

When I read the lectionary passage for this Sunday, I thought, no way am I preaching on that, I even thought there could have been a mistake, why is the story of Jesus crucifixion coming up now? Doesn't this belong in Holy Week? I considered finding another scripture, what was this doing here the Sunday before thanksgiving? then I saw that this was Christ the King Sunday and I felt even more hesitation. I often prefer kin-dom—it calls to mind for me an image of family and of connection, but I also was aware I didn't know much about when and how this word came to be used, I was aware of the discomfort I feel with king and kingdom, that the first thing that comes to my mind is power over and not just power over, but even an abuse of power. The words we use matter, our symbols and metaphors point us towards who God is and who we are in relation to God. I took my curiosity and my discomfort as a good sign and began to do some reading.

This Sunday is the final Sunday of our Christian year, next Sunday we begin anew with Advent. Today in our scripture it is the darkest of days, Jesus is being crucified, he has been betrayed, denied, and scorned. Above his head is the sign, "King of the Jews" to further mock and deride him. Is this our king? Matthew Boulton writes, "This is one of the rare times in the year when Christianity's two major feasts — Easter and Christmas, Cross and Incarnation — come into close connection. The one condemned before crowds in Jerusalem is the same one born in a forgotten, backwater town. As we enter into Advent, we with the shepherds, with Mary and Joseph, with the magi, all in our unique ways will ask, "Is this our king?" Who is Christ the king?

Boulton writes "Christ's kingship is a reversal of Caesars. instead of domination—servanthood. Instead of mockery—kindness. Instead of cruelty—mercy. Jesus' kingdom a reign of servanthood and neighborhood a community of love and mercy open to all; it is Gracious inclusion" to declare Christ the king is a radical political statement. It is Jesus' alternative to the Roman Empire. It is asking God to set up God's reign on earth instead of the martial, stratified, and repressive reign of Caesar. Because the kingdom of God has one purpose: to transform this world and restore God's good creation.

Our scripture has hard questions for us, Do we have faith to see Christ in a baby born to a poor immigrant family? Do we have faith to see Christ in the man condemned to die? And how do the ways we conceive of kingdom and kin-dom help us to do that? I wanted to know more about the origins of using kin-dom and how the concept of kin-dom and kingdom could be in conversation together. Here is what I learned, the scholar,

Ada María Isasi-Díaz was visiting her friend, a Franciscan nun named Georgene Wilson, when she heard the word for the first time: kin-dom rather than kingdom. As she sat with this word, turning it over in her mind, something clicked about her own life. For Latinas, she would go on to write, kin-dom offered a description of liberation that was "self-determining" within an interconnected community, seeing God's movement emerge from *la familia*, from the family God makes.

Kin-dom became the language she used to describe God's *libertad*, the liberation of God at work among people, the good news for those who suffer at the hands of kings. Isasi-Díaz dedicated her life to the work of *mujerista* theology, where the center of theological study is borne from the experience of Latinas. She wrote that, for Latinas, this liberation emerges from opening up space where love invites us into kinship, invites us to join others at a table that grows. Liberation is found not in hope deferred to another world, to life after death, but what can be created now

Holding onto these powerful images, let us return to the scripture, to Jesus on the cross. As he is dying on the cross, between two criminals he looks at those who have arrested him, jeered at him, forsaken him and Jesus asks God to forgive them, the leaders sneer at him, saying, "Let him save himself if he really is the Christ." The soldiers also mock him, saying, "If you are really the king of the Jews, save yourself." And even one of the criminals meaning to insult him says, "aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Reading these taunts reminded me of the temptations Jesus endured in the wilderness after his baptism—the devil said, "Impress me! Turn this stone into bread!" "bow down to me and I'll give you power over all the kingdoms of the world" and finally, "let's put God to the test, throw yourself down from a great height, prove to me you are the Christ!" to all these Jesus says no. How does he do this? Fully knowing God's love for him, Jesus experiences his sovereignty. And how does one who is centered in their sovereignty live? They are centered, a reconciler of opposite forces, they act rather than react, completely present, they are able to survey what is going on and take it in with a broad view, to remain steady in the face of all that is passing and superficial, to have practical wisdom, one who is sovereign is steadfast, resolute, decisive and fair, protecting harmony and bringing calm. Defending our own sense of inner order, our own integrity of being and purpose, our own central calmness about who we are, and our essential unassailability and certainty. Jesus, in right relationship with God, with himself, with each and everyone of us, he now is hanging on the cross, All his rights, everything stripped away, Jesus is sovereign, fully present to all that is going on around him, fully aware of all that he is feeling, experiencing; and the criminal looks at him and he sees this sovereignty, seeing what no one else can see in this moment, the criminal, experiencing a bit of his own sovereignty says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

This moment of sovereignty is so important, this right relationship to power, to our own self, in this moment Jesus replies, "I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise." It is our sovereignty in Christ that keeps us rooted in know what we stand for, that gives us confidence, purpose, well being and a sense of balance. It reminds of the sacredness of our bodies and how we live and move in the world, In our sovereignty we don't need to seek to impress other for our worth. There is nothing we need to do to prove ourselves worthy of God's love, we already, always are. Knowing this, we will have the faith to live lives seeing Jesus and asking, "Remember me, when you come into your kingdom"

Debi Thomas writes, "After Christ the King Sunday, we will enter into Advent, a season of waiting, longing, and listening. Holding firm to our vision of a better kingdom,

we will walk into the expectant darkness, waiting for the light to dawn, and straining to hear the first cries of new life. Yes, there are reasons for fear right now. Reason for anger, reason for grief. But we are not a people bereft of hope. We are not abandoned. We know where to look for paradise. We have the right king for this hour. Amen