

The King of Glory

believe it or not we are right at the cusp of the new year, which starts in exactly 1 week, since next sunday is the first sunday of advent, the beginning of a new church year.

and wrapping up all of our journey's this year is the feast day of christ the king.

and thinking about christ as our king, the question becomes where do we find king jesus in our day to day lives?

where do we run into him?

some say "find him in nature walks through the mountains," others "in the blue surf;" some say they look in their hearts and still others look for him in their minds.

yet those may not be the places best suited for running into the son of god.

perhaps today's gospel is the place that points to where we need to look if it's jesus we're after.

it's a frightening place to go however, full of violent men engaging in violent acts; a place where innocent blood is spilled, where death hangs in the air.

yes, today we celebrate the feast of christ the king.

what a great day, and by its title you'd think we'd be walking with jesus into jerusalem while the crowds yell out hosannahs in the highest, or standing with jesus on the mountain top as he gives the great commission to the apostles to spread the good news to the whole world; or maybe on that other mountain top when he is taken up into the heavens....

but none of those scenes greet us on this feast day.

instead, we are beckoned to gather our courage, and stand at the foot of the bloody cross, as the king takes his throne, his crown nothing more than thorns, his robes a mere loin cloth that barely hides his nakedness.

and do you notice the strangeness of it all, how there is only one person among all who are gathered who recognizes who jesus really is, and that one person is the crook, himself nailed to his own cross, who, among all those gathered, religious leaders, soldiers, politicians and even some of the disciples standing far to the side, it is only this condemned criminal who has the eyes to see that jesus is indeed the king of all that is —

when we think of kings, we often think of gold crowns and fur-lined capes and large signet rings and power and majesty and really good music — creating just the right atmosphere of power and awe and majesty.

but not this king.

instead, we hear four times in just ten short verses the mocking cries of “save yourself!”

and what these mocking catcalls assume is that for jesus to save himself, he'll need to call on power, on force, on violence, to see the desired end come about.

but that is not how salvation makes its way in this world, this world redeemed by jesus.

instead, to save himself, jesus creates a new path, a path we are urged to follow, it is the path to salvation through the act of surrender.

jesus surrenders to rome, to the high priest, to the fickle crowds, even to his fearful friends.

jesus surrenders.

and in the surrendering creates a new way of living life for all who will dare declare him as their lord and savior.

of course, surrendering isn't what comes naturally to us.

it's repugnant and it's something we look down our noses at, something we hope never to have to endure, since surrender brings with it humiliation, a recognition of

weakness, perhaps becoming the laughingstock of all those not yet brought to their knees.

yet it is precisely this narrow path that leads to life.

surrender is the cross carried, it is the sin forgiven, the anger released, the hate relinquished.

surrender is the narrow gate where life is found.

and we rebel at the very thought of it.

jesus, in his gory death, his utterly failed mission, sets out to create an entirely new reality for those foolish enough to follow him.

It is not just a changing of the guard, but a change in the very kingdom in which we live.

just like the ancient jews were hauled out of jerusalem and into the strange new country of babylon, with its different culture, foods, smells, language and stories, just so, to become followers of this strange king jesus is to be willing to make the abrupt shift of life from our present comforts, our present opinions and beliefs and attitudes, to a far and different country, where nothing is as we have known it to be.

this is the task undertaken by jesus and by every man and woman who preaches in his name: to create for you a new and different world, a world that jesus calls the kingdom of god.

so getting back to where we began, where can we see jesus in our day to day lives?

where might we run into him?

perhaps it's most likely to be in those places that most nearly look like the scene we have stumbled upon today.

perhaps jesus is most often found not in the downtown restaurants and not at the malls or the new car dealers....perhaps this king, who is so unlike our notions of

what a king should look like, smell like, be like, is most often found with the ones who suffer....whether that suffering is caused by poverty or the heartache of addiction or political repression or family feuds; for this king, who heals by his wounds, we find him where wounds are bleeding; we find him at work, healing those wounds, and in the healing, transforming the wounded into wounded healers.

tom long tells this story:

"years ago, when i was a seminary student, i spent a summer as a pastoral intern in the south.

i was assigned to visit and provide pastoral care to several families in the church.

one of these families was fairly large, parents and a number of children, the youngest of whom (i'll call him robert) was born with cerebral palsy.

when i would visit the family, i would often find them at the dinner table, or gathered in their den, laughing and telling stories, enjoying each other, but not robert.

it was as if the family was bathed in a circle of light — all except for robert, who stood isolated in the shadows, outside the circle, watching the others.

one day i happened to be visiting at this home and only robert's mother was there.

after we chatted for awhile, she wanted to tell me something that she experienced only a few days before.

she told me she had been sitting late in the afternoon in the very room where we were now talking.

she was reading or knitting (i can't remember which) and robert was standing in the darkness of the hallway, watching her from a distance.

she said she felt a strange shift in the room, something that caused her to look up and then down the hallway toward robert.

she told me: 'I saw jesus with his arm around robert's shoulder.'

she said she looked away, then back, and there was only robert.

"for the first time since he was born," she said, "i saw my son as already healed in the power of god." Long, *Preaching From Memory To Hope*, 29.

who is this king who dies a shameful death, alone, rejected and scorned?

who is this wounded healer?

paul knows.

paul tells us.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Col. 1:15-16

And so it seems that if we are looking for fact, not fiction, if we are seeking truth rather than lies, then come, let us, with trembling steps, take up the path of this strange king, so that our prayer might be:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

+amen