

Kings

So what are kings like?

This week we've watched one version of being a king play out in the front pages of our newspapers as every day new revelations unfold over the senseless killing of the journalist from Saudi Arabia.

Despite overwhelming evidence that the crown prince, and future king, orchestrated this atrocity, our own president, a man who some say wishes he were king, refuses to confront this Royal.

"Because the Saudis buy too much stuff from us," is the reason why.

This kind of king is all about power and control and fear.

But there is another way to be king.

That other way unfolds in the very first chapter of the very first book of Holy Scripture, the book of Genesis.

As one scholar puts it,

"If we truly took the Bible seriously, I'm not sure we would ever get past the very first chapter.

Consider: in ancient Near Eastern societies, it was the king who was thought of as the image of God; it was he who was appointed to rule over others and to be in charge of passing along God's blessings to the common people.

So that from the very beginning of time, the few were expected to rule over the many.

Genesis rejects this completely.

In Genesis, it's not the king who is made in the image of God — but each and every human being, so that the dramatic claim of Genesis is that we are all kings and queens.

No one is entitled to rule over anyone else.

This sense of shared humanity is as revolutionary now as it was 3000 years ago.

Genesis rejects classes and distinctions based on idiotic things like eye color and hair style and skin color and the shape of ones nose or eyes.

We know this because God creates fruit bearing trees "of every kind" and vegetation "of every kind" and creeping creatures "of every kind" and wild beasts "of every kind."

But when God creates Adam, there's not a word about God creating humans "of every kind."

That's because there are no "kinds" of human beings.

We are all only one kind: creatures made in the image of God.

Meaning, all human beings are royalty.

We are all kings and queens!

What might our lives look like if we took this to heart?

How might we act if we lived out this idea that every human being we come across IS royalty: Chinese or Micronesian, male or female or trans, hedge fund manager or drug addict — that all are worthy of being treated like royalty?

Genesis, the first chapter in our ageless walk with God, places human dignity at the center of our public and private worlds." Shai Held, *The Christian Century*, 11/7/18, 12, paraphrased.

Meaning, laborers are entitled to a living wage.

And those with more must be mindful of their obligations to their sisters and brothers.

That life's necessities are to be provided to all, like health care and a guaranteed minimum monthly income.

This truth of our real identity, revealed from the very dawn of creation, then forgotten and even rejected almost immediately, is the same truth Jesus brings to us today.

The consequence of this truth brings Jesus face to face with Pilate.

Pilate defines kings like we do — men who are ruthless, power mad and cruel.

But Jesus defines kings as God does, insisting that **all** people are royalty.

And because no one has the God given right to lord anything over anyone, the kingship Jesus embodies is deeply threatening to the powers of this world.

The kingship of Jesus rejects force and violence.

It leaves all judgment to God, and sets about looking after one another, especially the least, the lost and the left behind.

This Way of Jesus sets off a firestorm by those with power, it sets off an avalanche of accusations, all geared to kill the truth, to bury it so deep that no one will find it.

“And so they accuse Jesus.

The religious Dudley DooRights accuse him of blasphemy.

His own family accuses him of being out of his mind, while the high priests accuse him of plotting against the Temple, of forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar and of taking on the mantle of God’s son.

All of these accusations are piled upon him – and the question becomes – who is telling the truth?” N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus*, 144-5, paraphrased.

Truth is not an abstraction.

Truth is rooted in the divine, it is rooted in the holy.

Truth shines a light into the world’s dark and ugly corners, a light that brings, yes, judgment, but also mercy – to those places, and hearts, where it is so desperately needed.

Empires can’t cope with it.

The powers and principalities of this world can’t cope with it.

And so they call abject lies “truth.”

They create ‘alternative facts,’ which are conceived in violence, that give birth to injustice.” Id.

The truth of Jesus rejects all of this.

The truth of Jesus teaches us that if we wish real power, if we wish real insight, then the mirage of violence and power must be pierced.

With Jesus, we come to discover that God meets us not with power, money or fame.

With Jesus, we come to see that God meets us quietly, with gentleness; in the very midst of uncertainty; in the very midst of our pain.

It is in gentleness and understanding that God comes under your roof, and sits in your chair, and waits.

God, the peasant king.

That gentleness and understanding has many witnesses today: some are Christian, many are not.

One of them recently said this:

“I have no enemies and no hatred.

None of the police who monitored, arrested, and interrogated me, none of the prosecutors who indicted me, and none of the judges who judged me are my enemies.

Hatred can rot away at a person's intelligence and conscience.

That's why I hope to be able to transcend my personal experiences as I look upon our nation's development and social change, to counter the regime's hostility with utmost good will, and to dispel hatred with love.”

So said Liu Xia Bo, an imprisoned Chinese writer — who received the Nobel Peace Prize.

He didn't say these words when he received the prize.

He said these words to a Chinese sentencing court, after being convicted of “inciting State subversion,” a crime that cost him 11 years in prison.

Because all human beings are royalty, we can see God moving throughout our world in the voices and witness of all sorts of people; because God is alive throughout the world, in **every** human heart, Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, and atheist too!

Truth is especially important to embrace, and to practice, because our day to day reality is often little more than a race fueled by competition, domination and control.

Which only leads to stress, anger, and fear.

At a societal level, rejecting truth creates the shocking inequality of wealth that we experience today.

Rejecting truth causes borders to be closed to those in need.

Jesus, the King, invites us into a new way.

Jesus invites us to become a community of people who are reconciled with one another: who live with an abiding trust in this God who gives his life for us, and who promises to rescue us from the grave.

It has been said:

“A person can choose only within the world she can see.”

Christ the King invites us to step into God’s world; to take the time to look around this strange place where weakness becomes the path to friendship; where forgiveness dissolves hate; where death is the doorway to new life.

Pilate laughs at the world Jesus is creating.

“It is a fools game!” the wise and sophisticated shout.

And we are confronted with a question:

Do we choose Pilate's way of power and might — or the bewildering, yet life-giving way of Christ the King?

+amen.