

The Kingdom of Truth

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on November 21st, 2021 – John 18:33-38 & Revelation 1:4b-8))

So here we are at another end of another liturgical year. We find ourselves standing on the threshold looking back over one year and looking forward with hopeful anticipation to the next.

In our reading this morning we have a very interesting conversation between Pilate and Jesus. It is about very important issues – kingship and truth. The idea of truth has been canvassed somewhat in recent days in our political discourse. In an age of ‘fake news’ do you, like me, ask with Pilate, what is truth?

Very few of us here in Australia have ever known a king. We only know of kings in waiting and one has been waiting a very long time. I am sure you all have a view on who, if any, should be the next king in this country.

Pilate on the other hand, knows about kings, after all he was serving a very powerful king. He knew all about their power, as his job involved using the same kind of power. He knew they should be honoured, respected, feared and obeyed. As he looked at Jesus, he could not fathom why the people had accused him of being a king! Jesus looked nothing like the kind of king he knew. Pilate is almost incredulous – Are you the king of the Jews? Because you look nothing like what I expected! What have you done? I’m still finding this all a bit hard to make sense of, what have you done to upset them all to this extent?

Jesus answers Pilate’s question about kingship in a couple of ways. First, he never admits to being a king – who would want the prevailing attitudes both then and now be that which defines you. The kind of king, kingship and kingdom of which Jesus speaks, turns worldly understandings on their head. Jesus’ kind of kingship is that of equality and openness, of living and being together in mutual relationships of love and respect.

Secondly, he tells Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world. Unlike human kingdoms, the kingdom of which Jesus speaks does not use coercion and is not imposed.¹ Again Jesus, wants to completely redefine kingship. Kingship for Jesus is about a different kind of power, it is not the power of domination but the power of love expressed in selfless acts. This is the truth of which Jesus’ speaks and which will ultimately lead to suffering and the cross, a path in which Pilate himself, is about to play a significant role.

Pilate is still grappling with all that he has been presented – the request from the religious authorities to deal with Jesus, Jesus himself, and the few verbal answers he gives which seem almost cryptic. He has one final question for Jesus – what is truth?

Truth – is it simple? Is it absolute? Do we even have a monopoly on it? We know that thinking we are in possession of the absolute truth can have some ugly outcomes. Wars, acts of terrorism, prejudice. It seems to me that we never own the truth, rather it owns us.²

So, what is truth? Jesus gives Pilate no answer, at least no answer in words. But his very life provides the answer – the cross is the ultimate act of self-giving love and it is the answer. The truth is that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for it. Truth isn’t words, it is the word made flesh.³

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez p. 267

² ‘The Truth Does Not Belong to Us’ in *Interrupting the Silence*

³ Paul Hammer in *Imaging the Word* Vol 1, pp33-38.

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Jesus is the truth and we belong to his kingdom of truth. We are called to live into a kingdom of truth. We cannot possess the truth we must live it. Jesus doesn't call us to possess the truth, but rather to belong to it, to be possessed by His truth, to follow his truth, his way and his life as we listen to his voice. He has made us to be a kingdom.

A kingdom characterised by the lifestyle of the king, a life of service exemplified in the washing of feet. A life of love characterised by giving living water to an outcast woman at the well in the heat of the day, or feeding 5000 hungry people sitting on a hillside. A life where the blinkers are removed from our eyes. A life where that which has died receives new life. A life where abundant joy is shared around. That is the kind of truth to which our King calls us to live into and share with those around us. Kingdom life, or life with God is found not in power but in service, in involving ourselves in acts that give life and give it abundantly. That is the rule or the truth by which we are called to live. "Our commitment to divine truth ... requires us to investigate the connection between Jesus' words and deeds ... and our existence today."⁴

So, as we go into the next year, let us remember that as we stand at the end of one year and the beginning of another we are called together to live into this kingdom of truth.

Let me conclude with a poem⁵ which reminds us of Jesus, the king who reigns in our hearts and lives and in whose kingdom we find our place, whose lifestyle we seek to emulate and with whom we work to bring others in.

King is your word, not mine;
Friend I am, and not very choosy,
Pagans and prostitutes,
Publicans and sinners,
Grace is my kingdom.

King is your word, not mine;
Servant I am, no one beneath me,
Feet washer and waiter,
Serving the least
Love is my kingdom

King is your word, not mine;
Physician I am, free of charge,
Touch the leper,
Expelling demons,
Health is my kingdom.

King is your word, not mine;
A seer I am, seeing God's word
In mustard seed and yeast,
Wildflower and ravens,
Truth is my kingdom.

King is your word, not mine;
Tradesman I am, honing my craft,

⁴ James Cone in *Imaging the Word* Vol 1, pp33-38

⁵ Poem is called "King?" by Bruce Prewer, 2002.

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Familiar with wood,
Hammer and nails,
Hope is my kingdom.

Let us then go out into the New Year and live this kingdom of grace, love, truth and hope. Let us live out the kingdom of truth that was at the beginning and will be at the end. Amen.