

Making Us To Be a Kingdom

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on November 24th, 2024 – John 18:33-38 & Revelation 1:4b-8)

As I look around at the world there is a lot of kingdom building going on. Russia is attempting to take more and more land from Ukraine as it seeks to expand its kingdom. Israel is doing the same thing in Palestine. The military in Myanmar is doing all it can, to control the people. And we could probably go on and name many other places where similar things are happening – Taiwan, Iran. Then we just need to look at the current leaders in our world – Trump comes to mind immediately.

These regimes and leaders seek to increase their kingdoms, and this has been going on since the beginning of time. The thing they all have in common is the way in which they do their kingdom building. These regimes and leaders have no qualms about going to war, sacrificing and traumatizing their own citizens. They will use whatever they can to dominate and conquer others – violence, corruption, money, fear. They rule with an iron fist and do not care who gets hurt along the way. They will twist the truth at best. or, do away with it all together at worst. They set person against person and nation against nation.

Pilate knows a thing or two about this kind of kingdom building.

Pilate 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 such kings should be honoured, respected, feared and obeyed.

By contrast we see in the conversation that Jesus has with him during his trial, that they have significantly different understandings of kingship and kingdoms.

Jesus never says to Pilate that he is a King, he lets Pilate figure that out for himself. Our readings however say a couple of things about God's kingdom.

First, Jesus tells us that this kingdom is not of this world and it is for this he was born, and his kingdom will be about truth.

Many times, Jesus has described what the kingdom of God is like.

Mustard seeds and yeast, where just a little bit goes a long way. Seeds become trees providing shelter and safety for all. Yeast creates a loaf that feeds the hungry. A forgiving father lets his son go but is ready to welcome him home with open arms, forgiving and celebrating him. Farmers sowing seed wastefully. It is like a great banquet where all are included and celebrated.

Kingship for Jesus is about the power of love. It is about love and mercy seen in the way he heals people, the way he listens to people, the way he comforts people. It is about service – the one we call king bends to wash the feet of his friends, feeds the hungry crowds, teaches them. It is about welcome, acceptance and inclusion – where pagans, prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners and foreigners are embraced. It is about looking for the one sheep or coin that is missing, thus revealing the importance of everyone, even the seemingly insignificant. It is about vulnerability and sacrifice, seen most powerfully in the cross. It is about freeing people from that which binds. It is about abundance and joy. It is about compassion. It is about justice, about standing up for the exploited and forgotten people. It is about love, love even for our enemies.

Most of all, it is about truth – truth that love is the only way, truth that new life is possible.

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As you can see 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.

John in his reflections in the Book of Revelation talks of Jesus making us to be a kingdom. We are part of this. God's kingdom is not somewhere else and at a future time, it is in the here and now, it is amongst us.

So, what does it mean to call Jesus king? We must take care to not project onto God and Jesus 'worldly' understandings of what kingdoms and kings are, because as we have seen Jesus turns those ideas completely upside down.

So, what does it mean to be making us into a kingdom?

It means letting go of our power and agendas, replacing such with Jesus' agenda. It means forgiveness. It means practicing compassion, mercy and love. It means telling the truth and welcoming all. It means celebrating our diversity and not requiring anyone to conform to our particular ideas. It is about freeing others to be themselves. It is about mutual love.

St Patrick said – the kingdom of God is so full of light, peace, charity, wisdom, glory, honesty, sweetness, loving kindness, and every unspeakable and unutterable good.

Let us surrender ourselves to being made into such a kingdom so that our lives and our life together will bear witness to the truth that God is love. Amen.