

A Different Kind of Power

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The Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King

John 18:33-37

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

One of the joys of parenthood is reading bedtime stories to your children. Now that my son Zion is almost eight months old, we've read all the classics—Goodnight Moon, Green Eggs and Ham, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, and Corduroy, just to name a few. One of the recent books we read is Love is a Story by Todd Tarpley. It's a sweet little book that follows parents, grandparents, and children through all the seasons as they learn about the meaning of love. Some of the pages read:

"Love is the way that your smile starts to curve when a giggle's about to begin.

Love is a puddle with you in the middle.

Love is a laugh in the rain.

Love is a morning that bursts into color.

Love is your hand on a warm summer night and a marshmallow under the stars."

On the last two pages, it reads:

"Love is a hug when you need it the most.

And the best part of love is true: if you give away all the love in your heart, even more love will come back to you.”

It offers a beautiful reflection on love. The author references the places we might encounter love. What I appreciated most is the message that love can be found in the small moments of life. And every time we share love, we receive love in return. Although this book is secular in nature, I can't help but think about how it relates to our Christian lives. I firmly believe in the power of love, especially the love that Jesus modeled for us throughout scripture. Jesus was an active instrument of love. He ministered to the outcasts, sinners, the sick, the poor, and those on the margins of society. He reached out across boundaries of race, class, and religion. Jesus gave away all the love in his heart so that others might do the same. Jesus did this in a time when hate was prevalent and people wanted to destroy him and his followers because they represented an alternative model of power.

In today's Gospel from John, Pilate is facing Jesus, armed with earthly power. But Jesus does not come empty-handed. He comes wielding a different kind of power—not one from this world, but the power given to him by God. Jesus tells Pilate that his kingdom is not from this earth. He wasn't interested in the earthly power of the Roman Empire. Jesus came to offer his followers a new way of exercising power and authority.

When Jesus stood trial before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others

tell you about me?" Pilate responded with, "What have you done?" Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Jesus came to his trial with no signs of earthly power. He didn't bring weapons, nor an army of followers ready to fight. He stood before Pilate, offering an entirely different kind of kingship.

Today, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. It falls on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, celebrating Christ's messianic kingship and his sovereign rule over all creation. Christ's kingdom belongs to God, and Pilate's kingdom belongs to the world. The kingdom of God is bigger than any one individual; it belongs to all who belong to the truth. To "belong to the truth" means to recognize in Jesus the truth of God, to see the fullness of God revealed in him, and to hear the words of God in Jesus' voice. To be a member of God's kingdom is to listen for his presence in our lives and to look for His love.

In God's kingdom, love is the ultimate sign of power.

On earth, it is often difficult to recognize love when we are so consumed by the pursuit of earthly power. We turn on the news, scroll through our phones, and read the paper, and it feels as though people are using power in ways that lack the love Jesus talked about. It's hard to escape from this cycle. We can hardly see an alternative. But Jesus tells us in this Gospel that if we listen to his voice, we

will belong to the truth, we will belong to his love—a love not concerned with maintaining earthly power.

During my first year of seminary, I took a trip to the Holy Land with some classmates.

We visited many sites: the Jordan River, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Mount of Olives, and more. There were grand buildings and monuments constructed to mark these places as holy.

I expected to be overwhelmed by the presence of Jesus, hoping to feel the Good Shepherd with me as I visited these sacred locations. Yet, despite the grandeur, I couldn't feel his presence in those places.

Along our journey, we encountered street vendors selling t-shirts, icons, and jewelry as if we were on the boardwalk at Seaside Heights, not in the Holy Land. I felt distracted. It wasn't until we visited the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre that I truly felt the presence of Jesus.

The Centre works on the integration and empowerment of children with disabilities and their families. Through physical rehabilitation, inclusive education, and policy advocacy, they serve those on the margins of society. It was here, amid the care for these children and their families, that I felt Jesus. I heard his voice in the service being given, in the love that was being shared.

Jesus expressed his love through service—healing the sick, raising the dead, washing his disciples' feet. He is a king interested in serving others and creating change through his love.

I was overjoyed to witness that love being lived out at the Princess Basma Centre. The Centre wasn't as crowded as the other holy sites we visited, but it felt like a sliver of the Kingdom on earth. It was holy.

We often focus on the world's power and the control we have—or want to have. But Jesus offers us an alternative: a way that moves away from earthly power, a way that centers on God and the love He has for us all. Do we dare to adopt this approach? Do we dare to come to one another with love, rather than with hate? If we are truly followers of Jesus and members of His kingdom, there is only one way: the way of love.

A couple of weeks ago, I joined our Sunday Forum in the Harrison Room after the 9:15 service. There were about 25 of us, sitting in small groups. Elliot VanHoy, our Pastoral Associate for Youth and Adult Formation, asked us to reflect on our church experiences—both the good and the bad. As I listened to my group's responses about their experience at St. David's, I was overwhelmed with joy and love. They spoke of the warmth and hospitality they felt when they walked through the doors. They shared their appreciation for the Family Service, Youth Group, Pastoral Care, and Outreach ministries. One person said, "It feels like everyone is committed to living out their faith here."

What I heard was that St. David's represents a place where we can feel the love of Jesus. It is a place where we live out God's love and share it with others, yet we also receive that love in return. This is good news! St. David's is—and always will be—a place where, despite the anxiety and heartache we may

feel from the world's misuse of power, we can come and worship Jesus. Here, we are reminded that true power comes from love.

Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."