

Truth Telling

INTRODUCTION

Truth! Sometimes we hear a word that makes us stop what we're doing and reflect on our actions or words. Sometimes we hear a word that cuts through our rationalizations and pride and demands a reset on our whole lives. Spending time with Jesus can do that. He manages to speak truth in powerful ways. But we often are overfamiliar with the words or the stories that we don't listen deeply enough to hear the power. So, let us end liturgical Year B by engaging in some Truth Telling with Jesus in the gospels. It is a word we, the church, and the world need to hear.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Out of Their Abundance

November 10, 2024

Mark 12:38-44

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

Think, for a moment, about the sound two coins make as they clink into each other. Or better yet, if you have two coins lying around, gather them in your hand and shake them. What does that sound make you feel? Is it satisfying or scary? Is that the sound of abundance or scarcity? In the active soundscape of [today's text](#), the sound of two coins would easily be drowned out. Except, Jesus noticed and makes us notice too.

In the age of online giving (and don't get me wrong, online giving is a wonderful development), we don't get a chance to hear the offering very much, do we? The clink of coins is lost. Perhaps the value we place in pennies, nickels, and dimes has been lost, too. We no longer hear, see, or feel the weight of what happens when our small offerings come together in praise and honor of the God of abundant life. So, maybe this Sunday is our opportunity to change that, if only for one day.

I recently spoke with a pastor who told me about a practice in her congregation where the children go around with cans or jars to collect coins from the congregation during the offering. This first struck me because the pastor used the phrase "noisy offering." It is a noisy offering because of the coins and perhaps also because of the children, but it's a joyful noise because of both! The pastor then told me that they count up the coins every quarter or so and give the children a choice about which local nonprofit will receive the money. This church gave an extra \$1000 to local initiatives last year through their "noisy offering." Coins add up!

So, maybe today is a day to take up a noisy offering! Let the children and the children at heart collect coins from the congregation. A few weeks ahead of time, tell everyone when to bring their coins to church. Consider pouring all the coins collected into a bowl at the altar. Give the congregation the opportunity to hear what God does when we hand over our resources for God's use.

But also remind the congregation that this is the sound of the widow's offering. This is the sound of giving *everything* to God, trusting that God uses what feels like not enough and too much all at once to be everything we need when we live and work together as a community. So, consider what nonprofit(s) in your community will receive the blessing of this noisy offering. What community partners get lost in

the ruckus of the marketplace? Maybe Jesus is calling your church to notice, support, and amplify their work through God's abundance and some clinking coins.

PREACHING NOTES

You can't really blame Jesus for going off on the Pharisees at the beginning of our text for this week. He's just endured a long adversarial chapter being challenged and questioned and sneered at for what they thought were his beliefs. Sure, he was up to the challenge, and he was winning over the crowd. Mark included a telling sentence at the end of verse 37 when he wrote "and the large crowd was listening to him with delight." One wonders about the source of that delight. Were they simply happy to see the power holders get their comeuppance? Or is there something else there? Was their delight growing out of the affirmation that their suspicion that they had been sold a bill of goods as to what makes a good life was right after all? Was Jesus turning everything they had been taught about how to get ahead in this life upside down and it resonated deeply with them?

What they had been taught was that God works through deals. You do this and I'll do that. Easy, or rather simple. You do your bit and once in a while do more than your bit. Pay a little extra and get a better seat at God's table. Put in some overtime, split hairs on the detail of the law and you'll get a nice long robe and watch everyone in the marketplace bow to you as you pass. That's how their world worked, that's how the pharisees got to where they were. They did their bit, they served their time. Sure, maybe they had to foreclose on a widow or two, but business is business after all. And to make up for it look how much they gave, how much went into the offering box. Isn't that what we want, more in the plate?

Jesus throws a monkey wrench into the whole works. "Beware," Jesus says, "of this way of thinking. Beware of the attitude that it produces. Beware of turning people into commodities and forgetting relationships in favor of status. Beware." And then he embodies this wariness by going to take a seat opposite the offering boxes in the forecourt of the temple.

You can almost feel the weary sigh in the depths of his soul as he watched the production of giving played out in front of him. Attitude. There are plenty of attitude in the forecourt of the temple. Plenty of attitude displayed in front of the collection boxes, all thirteen of them. They weren't really boxes. They were more like long trumpets. You put your money in the wide bell end, and it rolled down to the collection end. And they were metal. So every time the coins were dropped in, the clink and the clank would sound all over the temple courtyard. Plenty of attitude and lots of noise. Some would try to impress with how loud a sound they could make as they poured in their coins. They would have unspoken contests as they rushed to clank down more coins. So there was clanking and clinking until it began to sound like the slot machines at Caesar's Palace.

In the midst of all this hubbub, a poor widow makes her way to offering boxes. As a counterpoint to the clinking and clanking of the large gold and silver coins being thrust into the boxes, a faint plink is heard as two copper coins are dropped in by the widow. Hardly worth noticing. Compared to the clank of gold and the clink of silver, the plink of copper sounds rather pathetic. And this copper is hardly worth bending down to pick them up out of the gutter. The Greek name for them is "lepta." King James called them mites. Mites? Who wants mites? Sounds like something you would spray your house to get rid of.

But, and here's the strange part, as she dropped them in, Jesus said to whoever would hear, "Look there, that poor widow has put in more than all those clinkers and clankers." No way, his disciples shout. You can just see Matthew whipping out his phone and firing up the calculator app, ready to give Jesus a simple lesson in accounting. "Look here, Jesus," he says, fingers a blur on the keys, "two lepta together amount to just a bit above nothing, Something like .00001% of what one of those guys with the big cars and long robes gave."

Jesus says, "you got your figures wrong," which is a terrible thing to say to an accountant like Matthew. "You see," Jesus continues as Matthew punches in the same numbers again and again, "they put in the extra that they had, what they didn't need anyway so they might as well buy a little prestige with it. But she put in what she had. They gave out their abundance, she gave everything she had, her whole living." And Matthew listened, understood, and closed the app and deleted it. To the questioning looks from the other disciples, he simply shrugged and said, "I gotta work to a different scale now."

The widow gave. No one expected her to, no one would have blamed her for not giving. Yet she gave. She dug deep down into her bleak existence and gave all she had. She sacrificed the bit of grain, a meager meal that should have purchased with that money, small as it was. She dug deep enough to feel her generosity.

This is the exact opposite of giving from abundance. Giving enough to feel. The problem we have with a stewardship emphasis is that we can hardly wait to get through it so that we can get back to faith, and hope, and bible study, back to the real stuff. Except that what you do with the talents and resources you have, that God has given you, IS the real stuff. There isn't anything more than that. If your faith, your Christianity gives you a warm feeling once in a while but never touches your wallet, then you haven't been hearing this truth from Jesus. If being a Christian means you don't swear too often or drink too much, but you are never moved to give more than you really can, you've missed the point. If following Christ means for you saying certain things and believing certain things, but does not mean that we are accountable for our belongings as much as for our actions then we have only scratched the surface. Most of us spend too much time on the surface of faith: debates and discussions, feelings and favorite hymns, pennies and potluck dinners. We are dealing with the topsoil, with the outer limits of our responsibility. Christ calls us to dig deep. To go beyond the surface, deeper than easy answers, beneath the comfort and confidence that all is right with the world.

This truth invites us to dig deep into our attitude for giving and to realize that sometimes, like the widow, all we have is not enough, but more than enough. And by giving up what we think we can't live without; we find a freedom to truly live. God will bless that response.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, take a deep breath. Breathe in the goodness of God's abundance all around you.

God's abundance is enough for all that we need.

Think of all the things our society calls abundance. Ever-growing bank accounts, possessions galore, status and notoriety—what are these things compared to God’s abundance?

God’s abundance is enough for all that we need.

God’s abundance notices the poor, the downtrodden, those whose labor and unmet needs fill the coffers of corporations and those who are wealthy beyond measure.

God’s abundance is enough for all that we need.

How, then, will you offer yourself up to God? Like the Pharisees or the widow?

We will give as people who trust in God’s provision, because God’s abundance is enough for all that we need.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Prayer for the Day

God, Protector of the widow,
the orphan, and the stranger –
in a world where many know despair,
you raised your Son Jesus
to give hope for humanity and renewal to the earth.

Continue to strengthen and unify your Church
in its struggles against the forces of death in the world,
where violence against creation and humanity
obscures the hope of the new life you offer.

This we pray in the name of the Risen Lord,
in the power of His Spirit. Amen.

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Prayer of Confession

Lord God,

We ask that by your holy light
you illuminate the instances in our lives
where we have not lived up to your name.

We denounce “obvious” evils in our society
such as murder, rape, domestic violence,
thievery, and sexual exploitation.

However, we often fail to remember
that your gospel calls us to see the world as you see it –
from the vantage point of the “least of these.”

In looking around us in this manner,
we see the daily evils that boldly counter your gospel.

We see societal ills that habitually oppress the poor.

We see societal ills that blatantly disobey your Word.

We confess that we have not been extravagantly generous
with our time, resources, or prayers.

Lord, forgive us.

Forgive us for not speaking against
an immoral budget that exploits our brothers and sisters.

Forgive us for ignoring the plight of those
unable to afford health care because of rising costs.

Forgive us for denying the tremendous damage
that racism does to our society.

Forgive us for remaining silent over issues of immigration,
the death penalty, and the need for a living wage.

Convict us to act in the name of Jesus Christ for justice and mercy,
just as you have shown toward all.

Remind us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Forgive us, dear Lord, for our daily hypocrisy.

Cleanse our souls and our bodies

with your saving grace. Amen.

Written by Jason R. Jenkins and posted on the website of the North Carolina Council of Churches, <https://ncchurches.org/lectionary-archive/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2018/11/prayer-of-confession-widows-mite.html>.

Benediction

Beloved, go from this place blessed by God who provides everything we need, who teaches us to notice the needs of our neighbors, and who inspires us to live in God's abundance as we share with one another. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Do Not Be Alarmed

November 17, 2024

Mark 13:1-8

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

As we come close to the end of the liturgical year, it is no surprise the lectionary has led us to something of an apocalyptic [text](#). I used to read the word “apocalyptic” and immediately think, “scary” (as in, the latest end-of-the-world disaster movie come to life scary). Certainly, on the surface of it, [today's passage](#) fits with the scary vibe, especially since the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE occurred just after or concurrent with the writing of Mark's Gospel. Mark's original readers had plenty of reasons to be alarmed by wars and rumors of wars. They—and we—know what that means.

So, how do we plan life-giving, hope-bringing worship around an apocalyptic text? I think we begin by recognizing that Jesus isn't telling us what will happen to scare us but to assure us that God is still with us. Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines—these are all going to happen, *and still*, God is with us. We are not alone. When we are tempted to believe that God has abandoned us, when we want to question what kind of God would allow such evil to happen, Jesus refocuses our attention—this is not the end. This is the hope that grounds our worship today—*all that is wrong in our world is not the end of the story*.

One way we claim that hope is by confessing our faith together. If you already include a Statement of Faith in your weekly service, encourage your congregants to recite the words in a spirit of hope and trust in the God who never leaves us. Whether you recite a creed every week or not, consider using the “Statement of Faith from the United Church of Canada” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 883) this week, as it offers an especially eloquent and profound statement of our belief in God who is with us in all things.

Also, consider how the prayers of the people might offer an opportunity to name the truth of the suffering in our world and the truth that God is still God and is still working to bring abundant life to all creation. Remember, Jesus didn’t attempt to make the evil of the world and the goodness of God make sense. Instead, Jesus proclaimed the goodness and love of God in the face of the terrible things we humans do to one another and creation. May our worship—our prayers, our creeds, our proclamation, and our blessings—do the same.

PREACHING NOTES

Methodist Central Hall in Toll Cross, Edinburgh Scotland has some interesting architectural features. But one in particular captured my attention as I sat in the congregation during my time at Edinburgh University. In the woodwork that surrounded the magnificent organ pipes there was carved an angel. Or an angel head to be clear. A medieval cherub, or chubby baby angel head hovering there over the center of the chancel. Behind the baby angel head were two trumpets, the long straight announcing the arrival of the king or the beginning of the end of the age kind of trumpets. But as I looked at them from my vantage in the pews, it looked like these were the old style hearing aids that we see depicted in movies set a couple of centuries ago. As I pondered this, I thought it was profound and perhaps even theologically significant that the central image in that sanctuary was an angel with a hearing impairment.

I grew familiar with the Central Hall angel over my time in Scotland. I even named him. I called him Herbie. Herbie the Hard of Hearing Angel. That’s probably not an appropriate way to name him these days, but it stuck with me. And with the congregation there at the time. When I finished my time there and was heading back to the US, a group from Methodist Central Hall took a photograph of the artwork and had it framed and named, and Herbie the Hearing-Impaired Angel hung in various offices where I served for the next many years.

What seemed significant to me about Herbie is that he really wanted to hear. Maybe it was because he was ensconced in the woodwork around the organ pipes that impacted his hearing. Or it may have been the sheer strain of listening so intently for all the hours he had been there that made him turn in those latter days to hearing trumpets. He really wants to hear. I’m not sure that we do. And I’m pretty sure that the disciples didn’t want to hear especially when Jesus wanted to tell them the truth.

It is hard to say what the bit about the stones was pointing to, to be honest. Unless it was something about where do you put your trust? What is the foundation upon which you stand? Is it buildings and structures, patterns and habits? Or is it something else. Something a little less tangible, something a little less valuable as the world measures value. Or maybe it was simply a prediction, a prophecy about the end of the temple. Whatever it was, Mark doesn’t dwell on it. Instead, he leaves the disciples gaping in confusion and whisks the inner circle off to a meeting on the Mount of Olives.

The agenda of the private meeting centered on what to listen to and what not to listen to. But the disciples seem to get the whole thing turned around. Or at least they didn't want to hear what Jesus needed to tell them. Jesus took those volatile sibling groups into this meeting and told them, again, what they had already rejected more than once. And no doubt they had learned from those previous lack of listening sessions and were more polite this time, at least Mark doesn't record any interruptions. They sat there and nodded appropriately and added their share of "hmm" and "err" and "oh mys" to the conversation. But did they really want to hear? Based on what has happened before and what will happen later it seems obvious that the answer is no. Jesus's words were full of struggle, full of pain, full of sacrifice. Are these the kind of words anyone really wants to hear? Only a fool would rejoice at the prospect of pain. So no, they didn't want to hear. The world doesn't want to hear. We don't want to hear anyone, not even Jesus, tell us that there is a hard road ahead.

But is that really the message? From this text, from this gospel? Is this the message that we, with Herbie, have been straining to hear week after week, year after year as we come to take our increasingly scattered seats in our sanctuaries? Well, yes, it is, at first. Unless we face the tragedy of brokenness, the pain of sin; unless we understand the struggle of living a Christ-like life; unless we know really know what sacrifice and suffering is about, then we aren't really listening.

But then who can blame any of us, any of them from turning a deaf ear to this message? If the message is about suffering, who in their right mind would want to hear? The problem has been in understanding that this part of the text is description. It is tell us what is happening and will continue to happen as long as we attempt to walk with Christ in a world that denies him – and some of those deniers claim to speak of him and for him. We've heard the description, and some have been good about proclaiming the description. But some have been less good on the rest of the message. The invitation and the promise.

First there is a call to sort through what we hear. Do not be alarmed, says Jesus. Don't let the news of the day get you off track. Don't let the difficulties throw you off and cause you to surrender to the ways of the world. A pastor in an evangelical church preached a sermon on the beatitudes from the sermon on the mount. Afterwards there was much pushback from the congregation. Some thought it was leftist propaganda. Another simply said, that might have been fine in Jesus's day, but it just doesn't work today. Don't be alarmed by what you hear. Don't be led astray. Don't be inclined to give up on the faith just to get by in a difficult world.

Secondly, there is a call to hope. Not an empty hope that is really a naïve optimism that just wants to wait until things get better. Instead, we are called to hold a profound hope, what some call a feral hope. A hope that will not be tamed, that is wild and unpredictable. A hope that tells us the pangs we suffer now are birth pangs and something significant is about the rise up in us and around us. That's the final word in our text for this week. (Go ahead and read the rest of the chapter and see that this is a fine place to end our reading!)

And then we listen. We strain to hear that hope rising. We look for signs of God's work among us and beyond us. We engage, we go to meet the risen Christ already at work in difficult places with difficult people. We listen, even when our hearing begins to fade from the strain. And we'll ask an angel for the loan of a trumpet.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, when wars and rumors of wars circle all around, Jesus says:

Do not be alarmed. This is not the end.

When earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, famines, and floods produce chaos and destruction, Jesus says:

Do not be alarmed. This is not the end.

When misinformation and disinformation try to dismantle relationships of trust in our families, churches, cities, and nation, Jesus says:

Do not be alarmed. This is not the end.

Children of God, whatever leaves you feeling unsteady, insecure, scared, and confused today--do not be alarmed. This is not the end.

We come to worship God who inscribes our ending, our beginning, and everything in-between in Love. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Prayers of the People

When the skies grow dark, and buildings fall, then hear us:

have mercy on us, Lord.

When deceivers come, and the nations rise in anger, then hear us:

have mercy on us, Lord.

When famines begin,

and when the earth shakes to bring the future to birth, then hear us:

have mercy on us, Lord.

When we take our stand to witness to your truth,

when our people are arrested and betrayed, then hear us:

have mercy on us, Lord.

When the sun is darkened, and the moon fails to give us light,

and when the stars fall from the sky, then hear us:

have mercy on us, Lord.

When you come in your great power and glory with your angels from heaven:

**Then, Lord,
gather us from the four winds—
from the ends of the earth,
to be with you for ever and ever. Amen.**

*Written by Michael Perry. Posted on the **Jubilate Hymns** website, <http://www.jubilate.co.uk/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/11/advent-prayer-that-we-may-be-ready.html>.*

Prayer of Confession

Let us open our hearts and minds to the truth of our lives, and let us offer that truth to God.

O God who loves us, hear our prayer. So often we come to you at a loss – at a loss for the right words, the right deeds, the right feelings. We know all is not right, but we cannot say with certainty what is wrong. There are deep divisions between us and others. There are too many who live in poverty and fear. There are too many horrific stories, and not enough hopeful ones. So we pray to you, our Creator and Redeemer, to make things right, and to make us right with you and each other. Turn us around from that which destroys toward that which heals and brings joy. And hear us again, as we offer you our confession in silence.

Silent confession.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, let us proclaim the Good News:

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!

Let us go out into the world as people made new by God.

Amen.

Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, “Hold Fast to What Is Good.” Used with permission. Posted at <https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession/>.

Benediction

May the Spirit that leads through fire and flood

The Spirit that baptizes with power

The Spirit of expectation and hope

Lead, strengthen, and guide you

This week and always. Amen.

*Written by Valerie Bridgman in *The Africana Worship Book, Year B* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), 221.*

Reign of Christ - Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – To Testify to the Truth

November 24, 2024

John 18:33-37

Color – White

PLANNING NOTES

Established in 1925, Reign of Christ (or Christ the King) Sunday may be just a year away from its one-hundredth birthday, but it is still a newcomer in comparison to other celebrations on the liturgical calendar. As Protestants, we often struggle to know what to do with this day, so we either ignore it or use the white and gold paraments and call it good. It doesn't help that our energies are already deep into Advent preparations, and in the United States, we have to contend with the Thanksgiving lull in attendance. So, as I make a modest case for observing Reign of Christ Sunday, receive this as an opportunity not to add more to your load before Advent begins but to end the liturgical year well before Advent sweeps us away again.

A key question to ask when observing the Reign of Christ is, "What kind of reign?" When we talk about Christ as ruler, we have to distinguish between the ways in which human rulers act and the way Christ as a ruler acts. Do we expect Christ to be like human authorities or to be the super example, the kind of ultimate authority that no human could ever be? Theologians typically say it's the latter. While the human construct of authority and reign helps us put some language to Christ's person and actions, Christ's person and actions go well beyond whatever we could imagine a human ruler being and doing, especially in terms of love, goodness, wisdom, truth, and use of power.

We see this comparison at work in today's text, particularly around the concept of truth. So, what truth does Jesus testify to in your midst? What truth does the congregation proclaim but not act on, like Pilate? What truth are you called to embody no matter the consequences, like Jesus? Which kind of ruler will you follow? Whose reign do you want to guide your individual and communal lives? These are questions to raise to the congregation throughout worship today—in the call to worship, in song, in proclamation, in prayer, even in blessing. When we celebrate the Reign of Christ, we celebrate that being under Christ's authority means that these questions—and so many more—guide our life as the Body of Christ.

Celebrating the Reign of Christ also means that we discern with Christ and one another the ways in which falsehoods, misinformation, and disinformation infiltrate our community. If we listen to Christ testify to the truth, then we also listen for how Christ's truth doesn't align with messages we may receive in the world. We pray for truth and love to shape our responses to all that falls short of Christ's testimony among us. We tell the truth about misinformation and disinformation and the harm that these cause. And we embrace the Spirit's ongoing formative work among us, knowing that we will at times get it wrong, but Christ will always lead us back as we admit our mistakes and try again.

PREACHING NOTES

Reign of Christ Sunday. Christ the King Sunday. Which fits better? Context is everything we are told. Interpretation shapes our understanding. And words matter, let's keep that in mind too. Can we talk about Christ as king without the history of patriarchy and dubious morality of human kings getting in the way and muddying the picture? Does Reign of Christ give us that sense of authority we are looking for, calling for obedience in a way that is transforming and directing? Is the tradition too strong to make the switch easily or comfortably?

There is so much to decide here at the end of the Christian year. Our calendar brings Year B to a conclusion this week. So, we need a declaration. We need a commitment, a culmination of another year long journey with Christ where we ponder his life and ours in equal measure. This week we come to as much of a decision as we can make, we claim the authority of Christ over our lives and declare Christ as king, the one who reigns.

Pilate struggled with the designation too, we can be sure. Our text for this week shows us that. The conversation, as with so many conversations in the gospel of John, takes place on more levels than we might realize. Certainly, more than Pilate realized.

You've read this story before, preached this text before. Perhaps it was much closer to Good Friday or Easter. You might have encountered this text in reference to the passion narrative and thought that it speaks mainly about the trial before the crucifixion. But there is a sense in which this narrative, this dialogue is a most important episode in the whole story of Jesus. In these 5 verses (well, five and half, we really need Pilate's response in verse 38a) there is a kernel and a capsule of the whole meaning and purpose of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the made manifest in the flesh here in this world. There is also a response to that human form that may be our unfortunate response to the God in our midst.

Pilate returns to his palatial offices only to find that once again the Jewish leaders help this man Jesus, bound and beaten and thrust before Pilate for condemnation. Pilate was reluctant, partly because he really didn't want to get involved in internal squabbles here in Judea. After all, he was here to represent Rome and to keep the peace. Law and order, that's what Pilate stood for. Temple politics and mystical religions didn't interest him in the least. As long as people kept quiet and paid their taxes, Pilate couldn't really have cared less what kind of God they worshipped.

He was also reluctant because he could see no harm in this man. Perhaps he was bit deluded, a bit over excited about the God he spoke of, but he was really just a country kid with a messiah complex. To condemn such as one to death by crucifixion did not sit well with Pilate's ulcers.

Yet, he was there to keep the peace, and the leaders of the people complained that he was stirring up the populace. And they didn't take the hint that Pilate gave the first time around and take this poor, bruised, wounded man away. So, he was obligated to at least make some kind of interrogation, to at least ask some questions.

He sat down behind his big oaken desk with the picture of his wife and the paperweight bust of Ceaser himself and said to man they held bowed and bloody before him, "so you are the king of the Jews?"

The man with his hands tied behind his back and his bruised lips beginning to swell said, "my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, I would have subjects who would have risen to fight to keep me from being

captured and beaten and bound. If it were I would have tried to rule and to lead and to act like a king. But my kingship, my reign comes not from this world."

Pilate, hearing and not hearing, understanding kingship to be a thing only of this world, with laws and power and sword, wanting to believe that maybe for a second there is treason here, leans forward and points an accusing finger, "so you are a king?"

The quiet reply, that takes the steam out of Pilate's outrage, deflates the argument. "You say that I am a king. You say, they say, everyone says that I am king. But I was born, I came into this world to bear witness to the truth."

There is a brief pause, Pilate leans back in his chair and addresses the ceiling as much as the man before him and asks, hoping and not hoping, "what is truth?"

The question is asked. Behind the question lies at one end the bored complacency of this bureaucratic ruler, stuck a thousand miles from home in a backward little country sitting as judge over backward little squabbles between backward little peoples. What could one of these possibly know about truth? He knew that truth was malleable, hammered into specific situations to bring about specific outcomes. He knew that truth was a commodity, like patriotism and power, to be bought and sold for the benefit of the ruling class. You could hear the sneer at the very idea even as he asked the simple three-word question.

Yet, at the other end lies, perhaps, a spark of hope that maybe this man, broken and bruised as he is, bound and tied as he is, can give some kind of response and tell, finally, what truth is. Or at least can say that there is no truth at all and thus end the question forever. Maybe this man.

The response to this off-hand, sarcastic question, the response to this plea for light in a world of darkness is silence. Silence that cuts the easy confidence and forces one to struggle, however ineptly, to face oneself and to answer our own question.

What is truth? How many times do we ask that question? Not in that form too often, but in many and various ways we ask it. "What's it all about?" "Why am I here?" "Why can't I ever get ahead?" "What or who is God and why is God so far away when I hurt the most?" "What must I do to be a follower of Christ in a world that tries so hard to go another way, its own way?" "This wonderful, almost magical, somehow mystical story of Jesus, who is the king but not of this world, tell me, is it true?" Those are the questions, those and many more, that we bring to church, that we carry with us at work, that sit in the back of our throats as we wait for a place to ask and for someone to answer. And no one will give us an answer.

At the same time, the silence in response to Pilate's question shows somehow that even to ask in the first place is to misunderstand the truth. The irony of this scene in Pilate's office is that the truth was staring him in the face, and he completely missed it and still asked "what is truth". By asking the question he was turning away from the only truth that can mean anything in a world such as ours. The truth is embodied in one who lived and loved and gave of himself to create a sense of connection and belonging, restoration and transformation. The truth that is discovered in relationship, in obedience and freedom, in bowing down and rising up in heart and in soul.

Someone said, have you ever known someone who told you the truth so strongly that you wanted to kill them for it? This one who reigns, this king who is a king beyond this world and yet who's kingdom touches this world through and in us, those who follow, this is the one to whom we pledge our allegiance this last Sunday of the Christian year. Jesus the Christ is not the king because he rules by law or decree, but because he bears witness, he testifies to the truth, the truth of this world, the truth of our lives, the truth of the world that is coming.

Our obedience is to join in testifying to the truth, in love and in invitation.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, whom do you follow?

We follow Christ, Ruler of us all.

Children of God, what kind of Ruler is Christ?

Christ reigns with love and truth, justice and mercy, compassion and peace.

Children of God, how will you live in the reign of Christ?

We will join Christ in choosing love, truth, justice, mercy, compassion, and peace even when our world tells us not to.

Children of God, come, let us worship God whose Love reigns over us, exemplified in Jesus Christ!

Come, let us worship! Thanks be to God. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.

Prayer for the Day

Loving God of power and justice and peace,

In our broken world,

We seek a new order

Where there is courage to speak truth to power

We seek a new order

Where there is mutual support in church and community

We seek a new order

Where there is abundant time for healing

We seek a new order

Where there is peace and freedom for all.

Amen.

From the Monthly Prayers page of the **Christian Aid** website, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/11/prayer-new-order.html>.

Prayer of Confession

Hide your truth in our hearts, dear God, for we are a people who are attracted to the error of our ways. We make bad choices, O Lord. We find ourselves in predicaments that make us sigh and groan. We have brought upon ourselves many of the disasters that have come our way. We were not honest and truthful in all situations. We even try to hide from ourselves when we realize that we are responsible for our own mistakes. O Lord, do not remove yourself from us. Forgive us, we pray, for the many sins, wrongdoings, shortcomings, and lies. Fill us with your grace and blot out our transgressions. Give us genuine love for each other, we pray. We thank you for the assurance of your forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ. Hear us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Written by T. Anne Daniel in The Africana Worship Book, Year B (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), 164.

Benediction

Beloved, may God bless you with the wisdom to discern the truth as you follow Christ, who testifies to the truth by embodying Love in all times and in all places. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, August 2024.