

## “What Is Truth”

Sermon by Rev. Chris Breedlove November 25 2018

Ref: John 18: 33- 37

Today is the last Sunday (Year C) in the liturgical year, commonly referred to as Christ the King or The Reign of Christ Sunday. Next Sunday is the beginning of Advent and a new liturgical year (Year A- one of three year long reading cycles). For today, I want to conclude the liturgical year by considering and reviewing two theological distinctions that often arise in the Gospel of John concerning the realm of faith and the way of truth.

### The Realm of Faith (**Kingdom vs Kin-dom**)

The thing about faith is that it's not just one part of our life. Faith is not just relegated to what we do on Sundays, or how we observe holy days, or in what matters we believe about God, no faith is more about a way of life than it is a mere part of life.

Faith is evidenced by how we treat and view other people and ourselves. Faith is often about relationships-- how we get along with others and in how we relate to God.

Jesus alludes to the kingdom of God in his limited conversation with Pontius Pilate (the fifth Roman prefect of the Judean region at that time). The “kingdom of God” language would have possibly been heard by Pilate as an uprising threat to Roman rule and peace, or it could have been understood as some kind of dead man walking humor-- gallows humor coming from Jesus.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God language was a prophetic indictment on the Roman Empire. In Jesus' prophetic gospel,

***Roman empire was an occupying oppressor and not a liberator,***

***Roman empire was temporal and passing, and not lasting and enduring.***

For Jesus, the kingdom of God was the life-giving and grace-filled alternative to human ways of oppression and unforgiveness.

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was a metaphor for the overarching and in-breaking movement of God in the beating hearts and pulsating minds of the people of God.

Brian McLaren suggests that perhaps we need a new metaphor for God's dynamic realm instead of the antiquated and problematic language of kings and kingdoms. The terms of kings and kingdoms are perhaps too long mired in negative and fanciful connotation. McLaren plays around with the title “the dream of God” in place of “the kingdom of God, and if the “the dream of God” falls somewhat short, McLaren also suggests, the revolution (of Conspiracy) of God, the Mission of God, the Party of God, The Network of God, and or the Dance of God.

With whatever we call the Kingdom of God, the point is that God is active in our lived-out faith and in the world all around and within our beings.

A theological trick is to simply drop the “g” in the Kin ”g” dom of God, so that it becomes the Kin-dom of God. The idea here is that the realm of God is about caring

relationships and about belonging to a family of faith that transcends nationality and empire system ways of life.

But, it's not always easy to be a part of any family-- especially the family of God (the Kin-dom of God).

One of the issues present for the original audience of the gospel of John was that of Christian Jews being excluded from the synagogues and communities of faith (John 9), especially after the destruction of the Temple in C.E. 70.

It's not always easy to get along well, to forgive often and love always, in communities of faith. This is why expanding the kin-dom of God is so difficult.

There was a man named Tex that was stranded on a deserted island just off the coastline in the Gulf of Mexico. Tex had been living alone on the island for several years before a pilot observed and landed.

The helicopter pilot was intrigued to see all that Tex had built and accomplished on the island. There were three buildings. Tex showed the pilate around the island buildings. One building was Tex's home and second structure was his church where he went to worship and pray each Sunday.

Out of curiosity, the pilate gestured toward and asked about the third building.

Tex mumbled, *I don't want to talk about it...*

Increasingly curious, the helicopter pilot pressed Tex about the third building.

*It's a terrible place, Tex shook his head, it's too painful for me to talk about...*

*I see, the shocked pilot said, What is this place of such darkness and pain that you don't want to talk about.*

Tex replied, *That's the church I used to belong to...* (story adapted from Peter Rollins story about Seamus)

The hard thing about the Kin-dom of God is that it involves us building community together, learning to forgive and love one another-- that's the holy work of being kingdom of God citizens.

### **Orthodoxy (what we believe) vs orthopraxy (how we believe)**

Pontius Pilate hears Jesus mention truth. Those that belong to the truth hear the voice of God. Pilate seems genuinely curious about what the truth is that Jesus is speaking about.

**"the truth"** The term "truth" in Greek philosophy had the connotation of "truth" versus "falsehood" or "reality" versus "illusion." However, these are Aramaic-speaking disciples who would have understood Jesus to be speaking in the OT sense of truth which was **"faithfulness" or "loyalty"** (cf. Ps. 26:3; 86:11; 119:30). (Dr. Bob Utley, John Commentary Notes).

The truth that Jesus is speaking of is a way of life and not a list propositional faith statements (i.e., believe this or that).

Walter Brueggemann explains that we're not dealing with intellectual or theoretical things here, but with *"a way of being in the world in suffering and hope, so radical and so raw that we can scarcely entertain it"* (*The Word Militant*)

In my faith experience, such the gospel truth of Jesus is:

- Humbling-- God's truth is inviting but also inexhaustible-- the more we learn about God, the more we fall in love with God, the more and more we realize how thin, frail, and temporal we mortal humans truly are.
- Truth is a matter of learning to let go of the petty, and in learning to appreciate the power of grace and love. Grace in the end, is the only lasting power worth holding on to. And the truth is that divine grace holds on to us more than we are holding on to it.
- Truth is not a matter of fact or fiction, doctrine or tenets, rather, truth is in the way that we live our lives more fully, with love and grace toward others.

Amen.