



Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Lara Forbes



Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Reign of Christ

November 21, 2021

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

John 18:33-37

Grace to you and peace from God, our creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The poet Warsan Shire writes: *later that night I held an atlas in my lap, ran my fingers across the whole world and whispered, "where does it hurt?" it answered, "everywhere, everywhere, everywhere."*

As I mentioned at the beginning of worship, today is the last Sunday of the church year. Pope Pius XI named this Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday in 1925 after Benito Mussolini, the Italian fascist dictator, had claimed authority over all the earth.

It was arguably the beginning of one of the most difficult times in our world's history, and Pope Pius wanted to make sure that Jesus' followers remembered who ultimately had authority over them.

So it's fitting that the Gospel reading for today is what it is, because it's in this dialogue and the events that follow that Jesus demonstrates a power and an authority that people had never seen before - and it went beyond anything that anyone expected.

At this point in the story, Jesus had been betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and abandoned by all the rest. He has been shamed by the high priest and he's about to be physically beaten by Pilate's soldiers. He'll soon be wearing a crown of thorns and then executed.

If there was ever a time for Jesus to act like an earthly king and order his disciples to fight for him with violent military power, this was it. But he didn't. Instead, Jesus responded to the kingdom of the world in a way that showed who he was and where he came from.

On the surface, his actions made him seem weak. But he ended up being a more powerful leader than anyone expected. On the day that he was crucified, Jesus showed us that *his* kingdom is one of love. That's the truth to which he testified, and he embodied that love in a world that was in as much pain as ours is today.

¹And when he did that, he made a claim that no earthly leader is willing to make - because if they were to claim Jesus' kingship, meaning Jesus' authority, their *own* authority would vanish.

The Bible is filled with stories of the kings and the kingdoms in Israel's history, and it didn't turn out so well. And we also know that the Roman Empire wasn't as good for everyone as it claimed to be.

1 <https://revgalblogpals.org/2018/11/20/revised-common-lectionary-on-kings-and-christ/>

Because, despite our best efforts, the kingdoms that humans construct are characterized by violence, destruction, exploitation, and oppression. But Jesus' kingdom has its origin at the throne of God, and it's focused on justice. That doesn't make it the opposite of human kingdoms, though, because Jesus' kingdom functions differently altogether.

It's a state of being, a way of living, a commitment to relating to the world in a way that recognizes the reality that's going on - the violence that's being committed against the environment and against human beings all over the world, and the fear that perpetuates it.

It's a way of living that acknowledges that these things go against the love that is the fundamental nature of Jesus' kingdom.

If we were to define it as an actual place, Jesus' kingdom would be one in which the well-being of every person would be at its heart. It would be a place where no one would be scared, where everyone would have enough, where everyone would feel and *be* safe.

It would be a place rooted in the love of the Incarnation - the Word made flesh. The love that doesn't ask if you're worthy of receiving it because it's simply given to you. Jesus' kingdom is a place where that love is visible all the time because it *is* love.

That's the truth to which Jesus testified, it's the truth of who he is.

And as people who follow Jesus, our calling isn't to align with the kingdoms of this world but with the one of Jesus. It's our calling to seek that truth - that love - and embody it and make it visible in our world. Because Jesus is the truth we live by.

Several years ago my sister, Leah, was on her way to a family picnic at a park up near Arlington. And she knows I'm talking about her today. As she was driving, the street she was on approached a hill. And she noticed that, up ahead on the sidewalk, was a woman trying to push her motorized scooter up that hill because the motor didn't have enough power to go up on its own.

And as Leah got closer, she noticed several other cars just racing by this woman who clearly could have used some help. So when she got to where the woman was, Leah pulled over, got out of her car and offered to help. And the woman said, "Sure, of course. I would love some help pushing this."

And Leah said, "No. Get in and *I* will push you." And she did.

When we think about the truth of Jesus' kingdom and how it works, that's what it looks like. It's a truth that still needs to be spoken today.

And as people who proclaim that "Jesus is Lord," that's what we do. When we live that truth, when we do the work of Jesus' kingdom, it might make us seem weak on the surface. But it has a lasting impact in a world that seems to be growing more divisive and less compassionate.

Because when we live the truth of Jesus, we do things like pull off to the side of the road and help someone when they need it. Or bring a meal to a family in need. Or check in on someone who is having a hard time. Or pray for the person who gets on your last nerve. Or stay in a difficult conversation when it's easier to walk away - or *start* a difficult conversation, even when it means rocking the boat.

And none of this is to say that it's easy - or even convenient. Right? But that's when it matters the most.

Because when we live the truth of Jesus and his kingdom, we seek to alleviate and eliminate the pain of others - and embody the love that might make us seem weak on the surface, but in reality it's an act of power that disrupts the fear and violence in our world, and ultimately overcomes it.

Because it's rooted in the love of the Incarnation - the Word made flesh. It's what makes us who we are. It's the love that is given without asking if you're worthy of receiving it. And Jesus' kingdom is the place where we all receive that love *because* it's freely given. Thanks be to God! Amen.