

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (B)

November 25, 2018

Daniel 7:13-14

Revelation 1:5-8

John 18:33b-38a

My tendency is to pull into a parking place. To back into a space, I find it work and somewhat tedious. Yet, this is what we need to do today as we ponder the sacred word on this Feast of Christ the King. We go at it in reverse order, starting with the gospel passage from John. There is an attempt at dialogue, Pilate and Jesus are there exchanging words, but real communication seems to be elusive. A political man asks political questions. A spiritual person answers political questions in a spiritual way. We need both, the political and the spiritual, for we live in a social/political realm as we yearn for so much more. This is like backing into that parking space, you really have to look and watch, to back up and pull forward a few times, all with the hope that you will arrive comfortably between the lines. I envy those folks who seem to do it with such ease.

Here, Pilate is the middle man, the Roman authority, caught between Jesus the religious leaders. Pilate seems genuine when he asks Jesus, "What have you done?" Yet, he must maintain order and the kingdoms of this world are built on violence and force. He wants to know if Jesus is a threat. He has heard about Jesus and he cannot help but ask if he is a "king." Jesus, the spiritual man, has another way of understanding himself. He is a "witness to the truth". He lives within and reveals the ultimate relationship to God and creation. Unfortunately, the political power of Pilate and the spiritual depth of Jesus are far from one another.

In the Gethsemane scene in Luke's account, Peter cuts off the ear of the servant of the High Priest (25:50-51). Jesus says simply, "No more of this," and heals the man, restoring his ear. Jesus has spent his entire ministry giving people ears to hear, he is not about to start taking them off. The deeper inference here is that the beginning of violence is the end of dialogue. This is why Peter's sword severs the ear. Those who take up arms can no longer hear one another. Ears have to be restored for dialogue to happen and for violence to end.

Jesus refuses the sword. He is committed to the Word as the only way of influence with another. If he belonged to this world, he and others would advocate fighting to secure his safety. But the world that he comes from relies on love as its sole strategy and protection. Jesus present before Pilate, witnesses to God's unconditional love. No muscle, no force, no threat, Jesus will not terrorize. The wager is that once divine love has been revealed, people will realize this is what they have been looking for all along. Before the coming of Jesus, people would not have been able to explore their inner drives with enough depth or clarity to discover their communion with love.

Dialogue takes the place of force. Discussion has the same root as "percussion" and "concussion" There is a hitting against, where sounds do not blend but where one wins out over another. With discussion, ideas are batted around, one or more are accepted by people and many more are rejected. Dialogue is the free flow of meaning that becomes shared by all involved (Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*).

This Feast of Christ the King is kind of tricky. It is difficult for us to properly understand Christ's kingship, because our images of kings don't really fit. Pope Francis alluded to this in his 2017 message inaugurating the World Day of the Poor: "The kingship of Christ is most evident on Golgotha, when the Innocent One, nailed to the cross, poor, naked and stripped of everything, incarnates and reveals the fullness of God's love."

What may seem like a feast exalting Christ's power actually celebrates his powerlessness and poverty in contrast to the powers of society. Calling Christ a king, we remember his title comes from God's realm of unconditional love. Thus, Jesus will not fit our models nor act on our agenda. As we claim Christ as king, we must strive to live the values of his realm, always learning from him how *to witness to the truth*.

We close this church year, pondering the truth, the sacred word. We celebrate and receive Eucharist, empowered to keep Christ at the center of our lives as we begin another new week.