

“Whose Crown?”

Dramatic Reading

Presbyterian Church in Leonia

November 24, 2019

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Luke 23:33-43

Pastor Leah: You may think it's pretty strange to hear a reading featuring Jesus' crucifixion on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, and the Sunday before the Advent season begins. It's strange even considering this is Christ the King Sunday. Now, we don't have kings here in the US; the founding of this country was based on the idea of a democracy-- the idea that the people will rule the country, not some king or queen. Still, we know about power here, and if you've been watching the impeachment hearings you know that even the people who elected their leaders become subject to those leaders' power. But that's not the only sign of kingship around us. I have actually invited some kings I have heard of to come and tell you about their kingdoms. You may have visited these kingdoms before, but today they have a special offer for you to make your home within their kingdoms. Please allow them to make their pitch to you-- and you might find just the right one!

And if you need more time to think about it, you can absolutely find them on social media. In fact, they are **everywhere** on social media: Twitter, Facebook, Insta, YouTube-- you name it. Welcome, Kings! What do you have to tell us today?

Kings line up-- Wanangwa, Vicky, Jihyun, and Jonathan come up onto the chancel and sit in big chairs until it is time for them to talk. When it is your turn to talk, dramatically place your CROWN on your head right before you speak. REEVE will sit on chair on the floor level.

Wanangwa: I am the King of Fear. I keep you up at night, worrying about a future that is beyond your control. My power is great. I can deceive you to believe that by worshipping me, you will be powerful too, and safe. I am a jealous king, and so I want you to do nothing ever than to worship me. I am a constant companion, and if you ever have trouble sleeping I will be sure to keep you company by running through your mind, over and over again. One thing about my kingdom is that people are relatively safe. They don't climb trees or learn to ride bikes or skateboard, so children in my kingdom don't fall as much as children in your kingdom (although we haven't figured out why our adults are so clumsy). A word of advice if you enter my kingdom: trust no-one. You'll

notice people have secure fences in my kingdom, not only around their yards, but around their hearts too. It's better that way-- a heart cannot be broken if you don't let anyone in. You are allowed to worship God as well as me in my kingdom, but only if you see God as an angry punisher who carries a long list of your every sin to keep you in line, and is ready to smite you at any given moment. On the other hand, if you hear a voice telling you to lead your people out of slavery, or to prophecy even though you are only a child, or to slay a giant warrior with only a rock, then it most certainly isn't God, since God would *never* take you out of your comfort zone. Come, join my Kingdom, and it's the last scary thing you'll ever have to do.

Vicky: I am the King of the Status Quo. I like to keep things just as they are. If you worship me, I can protect you from the threat of what is different. Why risk change when we can never be sure what it might bring? I run a tight ship: if everyone does their part, and never steps out of line, things go smoothly and exactly as we expect. I even have a slogan for my kingdom, just 8 words, that works anytime someone suggests something out of the ordinary: "But we've never done it that way before!" This simple phrase casts a spell on anyone who hears it and without fail puts the brakes on any new idea, and it keeps them from straying into chaos. The gift that honors me the most is Complacency. Come to my Kingdom, and you can count on things staying the same. Why wish for better when you can have "OK enough?" I will, however, require that you do your part in silencing those who try to imagine anything different, those who may look different, and those who try to protest my rule. Remember that time that Jesus tried to heal on the Sabbath? Well luckily there were some Pharisees who had decided to be my royal subjects who set Jesus straight. Well, at least they *tried* to... Anyway, you're certainly welcome to come to my kingdom, but when you get there, be sure to check out how other people act so you can be just like them. It's taken a while to cultivate our society *just so*, and I'm sure you'll find it quite satisfactory. Won't you come? Oh, and when you come to my kingdom, pay no attention to the crosses on the horizon. Those are just for the rabble-rousers who like to make trouble. They shouldn't affect you...

Jihyun: I am the King of Greed. You'll like my kingdom because I will just let *you* do you; it's each man for himself. Something you will love about my kingdom is that I won't ask you to give up anything for anybody. We have a tax-free policy, so you won't have to pay for someone else's schooling or healthcare. We suppose that if you cannot figure out those things for yourself or your family, you don't belong in this kingdom. We know how to protect our wealth at all costs. If that means from time to time stealing from other kingdoms, (shrugs shoulders) well, that's just the cost of doing business. If

you find here that your soul is thirsting for something more, well **MORE** is the best of what we have to offer! Let me give some examples: you can try more alcohol. It is guaranteed to numb your pain. You can work more. Not only will it get you more money, but it will also give you less time to wonder about your purpose-- because clearly your purpose is to produce and to earn. If you are not sure whether you are accomplishing your purpose clearly, then might I suggest an emblem of your status: perhaps a fancy new sportscar, an extra boyfriend or girlfriend, or a facelift to remind you of your belonging and worth here. Oh, and if you're coming from another kingdom, let your people know that we have JOBS available. It takes people power to keep our kingdom going! They will have to work for a lower wage until they get citizenship here and can make minimum wage, but once they see the treasures of what they might achieve once they belong here, the hope that they can take part in that too will make them eager to give it a try. I'm trying to build my kingdom here and would like you to join me. I have established my kingdom in other times as well; they called me Caesar, they called me Pharaoh. Have you heard of me?

Jonathan: I am the King of Nationalism. I know that my kingdom is THE BEST, and its people are THE BEST. I do not just *pledge* allegiance to the flag. I worship it! Blood and soil-- let's keep our culture **pure** by protecting our borders, our language, and *our way of life*. I will even help you to create myths that will erase the less pleasant or troubling parts of your history. Was your land stolen from other people? Then let me tell you a story you can teach about how your country started with a joyful feast of sharing hosted by native people who were *delighted* that you came here. I have actually been around for quite some time. I tried some experiments out in other places in the world, and was in fact successful in wiping out millions of people in the name of purity. I see this country has some potential, and since it is clearly *the best*, I have some projects going on right here, right now. I have noticed how you worry about the economy, and about trade, and about the changing face of culture here. Let me share my ideas with you, and I will help you decide who is to blame for your country's problems. Together we can design a campaign against that group or groups. You say you want to experience unity in your country? What is more unifying than hate? Here's the thing: in my kingdom, you can have your religion, as long as it never questions me and never gets in the way of bowing before me and following my agenda. Because you know, religion has absolutely no place in politics, so you had better just keep your head down and stay out of my business if you know what's good for you. Swear your allegiance to my kingdom, and you no longer need to worry about what is right and what is wrong. The world is too chaotic anyway, so just leave it up to me and I will make all the decisions. So what do you say? If you want to feel like a winner, well just join the kingdom of winners and win with us.

Reeve: I guess you can call me the King of the Jews-- others certainly have. They also call me the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Prince of Peace. But you can simply call me Jesus-- if the formalities of titles get in the way of knowing me. Because I truly want to know *you*. My throne? It is a manger in a simple stable. My palace? The sea where people fish, the mount where people gather; my palace needs no building or stone, just open hearts ready to receive me. My scepter? It's a shepherd's staff, so I can gather the lost. My crown? (*puts on crown of thorns*) It has thorns, not gems. One thing you should know about being part of my kingdom: it is not easy. You may be asked to stand up against evil. You may have to make choices that are not popular. Your *life* may even be demanded of you. But here is what I can promise you: I will see you for who you are, and I will love you, and then I will show you who God has called you to be. I will feed you. Not just daily bread, but the bread of life. I will wash you-- not just in a cleansing river, but in ways that can allow you a new start, even when you fail. I can promise you my presence, and I will even give you glimpses of me. These may not be how you expect; don't look to the heavens for me to come on a chariot descending from the clouds. Look for me instead in the face of the child. Look for me in the gathered church. Look for me in the tear-stained face of someone who is weeping, or in the hollow eyes of someone who hungers. Especially if you welcome the child, if you open the doors of the church, if you comfort the mourning, or feed the hungry, you will find that I am there. I can, in fact, promise you life abundant. My door always stands open. There's a place to hang your nets at the entry. Come to me, and I will wash your feet. Will you follow me?

Pastor Leah: Thank you, Kings, for your gracious invitations. Christ the King Sunday invites Christians to reaffirm that Christ is sovereign-- or king-- above all others. But this is hard to do. Even Peter, the disciple who was always professing his loyalty to Jesus, had his moments when he failed to proclaim Christ as Lord above all others. He had his moments in the Kingdom of Fear. One confusing part about these other Kingdoms competing for our hearts and our loyalty is that each of them offer things that we need and that are not inherently bad. We all want and need to earn money, to provide for ourselves and our family. Wanting to have stability in our lives is not inherently bad. The desire to be safe from harm is something we all want, or should want. We want to be patriotic towards our countries, and to protect the values our society is built upon. But when any of these desires grow to the extreme, they become a kingdom, one that becomes more important than God. Our desire to be safe enters the Kingdom of Fear when we fear risking anything, especially when our faith requires that we make courageous choices. Our desire to provide for ourselves and our families enters the Kingdom of Greed when our desire for money or other status symbols keeps us from

being generous or hides the values that have no price. Our desire for stability in life enters the Kingdom of the Status Quo when we are unwilling to change, especially when the Spirit offers moments of transformation for ourselves and our world. Our desire to be patriotic enters the Kingdom of Nationalism when we build walls to keep others out and marginalize others who do not match our notions of “purity,” and when our country’s peace and prosperity comes at any cost, even the suffering or destruction of other nations.

I would now like to invite you to meditate on which Kingdom has been trying to recruit you. What voices are enticing you to leave God’s Kingdom in pursuit of some other form of power? Talk to your neighbors in your pew about these temptations. Then, we will return to what we offer each Sunday, when we proclaim the Kingdom of God and practice living in it. Practicing this Kingdom, or Beloved Community, is an important reminder because there are so many competing Kingdoms out there asking for our allegiance.