

There are those times...inexplicable moments...
when we are rescued or
when we are empowered to act as one who rescues others.
I am convinced those momenta...
are indeed evidence of a power beyond ourselves.

And when we realize it...when we embrace God with us in the midst of our pain and
despair, our challenges, our chaos...
the wild fires of our lives...
we understand we are part of a community...
a kingdom that is not of our making or management.

"My kingdom isn't from here," Jesus told Pilate.

The truth...our reality, even today...is all who listen to Jesus' voice belong to
the truth and are part of his kingdom.

That kingdom...God's kingdom is present whenever we experience healing and
restoration.

Mr. McKay and Ms Davis, Ms Ludwig...along with many others, whose names
we may never know...offered the children on that bus and others fleeing the wild
fires a glimpse of God's kingdom.

This day...may their story help us see it as well..
Even here...especially now.

Will you join me as we pray...

O loving God, thank you. Thank you for showing up when we need
you the most. Thank you for dragging us along until we are willing and able to
follow you with renewed trust and determination. Forgive us for far too
often giving up on ourselves, and those you send to us to pull us out of our
funk and into your community of love and acceptance once again. Help us
remember who you are and yes, whose we are. Guide us out of that which
feels like fog...or worse oppressive smoke and flames...that trap us and sucks
the life out of us.

This day and in the days to come may we celebrate the gift of
Jesus...and the reality of the kingdom of love and forgiveness and

reconciliation he continues to offer to all people. May we embrace that accepting love ...and respond with love and acceptance for all.

Grateful...in his name, we pray. Amen.

We have not celebrated "The Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday" since I have been here...and this is my 4th year.

It is a Sunday that exists every year...

as it is the last Sunday of the church year...

or the Sunday just before the First Sunday of Advent which marks the beginning of the new church year.

But many years...like the past three...that day falls on the Sunday before Thanksgiving and we find gratitude and thanks for many and much an easier cultural default setting.

Even the scripture for this day...is a bit challenging.

Why is it that a text spoken by Jesus...just before his crucifixion...appears on the prescribed preaching text list, what we call the lectionary.... for this day?

Why? Because this is a celebration day...although I don't think Hallmark has embraced it as such.

This day, we celebrate the coming reign of Jesus...the completion of God's plan for all humanity...which does indeed come to us...

as a child is born in Bethlehem.

Jesus and his followers...including each of us...belongs to a kingdom that is not earthly bound. King and kingdom take on a new reality...

one linked to the truth...God's truth and our reality.

Jesus responds to Pilate's grilling... explaining that the nation, the kingdom to which Jesus belongs, is not a political or geographic reality, but a theological one. I feel certain that Jesus' response to Pilate was annoying...certainly frustrating. Do you claim to be a king?

What Pilate is thinking is...if you are, Jesus...

that is treason...

and we could indeed put you to death as a threat to the Roman Empire.

Jesus' replied, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. ...My kingdom isn't from here."

Pilate of course, as we know, caved. He had no reason to execute Jesus...but we know that death was not the final answer.

The reign of Christ remains. Jesus understood his mission and stated it clearly...although doing so still baffled Pilate.

"You say that I am a king, Jesus answered. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice."

Emilee Towns, professor and theologian at Yale Divinity...offers an explanation of this challenging understanding of the identity of Jesus. She writes, "The interplay between the more intellectual understanding of truth (which Pilate represents in this passage) and truth as revelation (which we find in Jesus Christ) is an important one to explore for contemporary hearers of the Word. We are compelled to go beyond merely understanding and making sense and order in our world. We must seek to know God and live as active witnesses on this journey into God. Jesus' life and mission is a model of this for us."

We are to be active witnesses. We are to notice God with us.

How Jesus lived...who he loved and forgave and healed...
reveal to us the truth...of how we are to live and follow Jesus.

Our task...is to not only accept responsibility for the world around us, but to seek to be part of God's transformation of the world. The truth Jesus calls us to in this passage and in others, originates in God, not in humanity. This is all about God's ongoing revelation of God's love and grace in our lives...all of our lives.

The reality that Jesus proclaims is that our being part of God's kingdom, our belonging is not up to each one of us alone.

Our belonging is up to God. Our participation, our actions, our acts of healing and restoration are empowered by God's spirit...for the transformation of our world. Our task, our mission in living is to respond...lovingly to God's love.

This scripture is really stunning.

It is the very last encounter Jesus has with a human being before his death.
At least it is the last time we have record of conversation.

During this encounter...Jesus makes an offer to Pilate.

"Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice,"
says Jesus to Pilate.

Even to Pilate... Jesus offers to be the good shepherd,
the shepherding king who when his sheep listen to his voice...
they are rescued...led into abundant life.

Are we listening? Do we hear Jesus call to us?

Or, are we so distracted by our wild fires we no longer hear his voice and are
no longer capable of responding?

Thank God, Kevin McKay heard Jesus...or God...or whomever he understands
the guiding empowering Spirit of his life to be.

Kevin's son, his mom and his girlfriend had already evacuated to a hotel in
Chico earlier that morning.

Earlier this week, in an interview with reporters Kevin stated, "That freed
me up to focus completely on this terrifying situation.

The two teachers on the bus confessed they were several times along the
journey when they were convinced that they all were going to die as flames
surrounded them and smoke filled the bus.

When they did arrive safely in Chico...Ms. Davis' husband ran to Mr. McKay
and hugged him...in his words..."so damned hard he nearly lifted me off the ground."
And I will tell you from the pictures I have seen Kevin McKay is not a small man.

And, for the families of those 22 children and the two teachers...he will
forever be, "the bus driver from heaven."

God does indeed continue to empower us...even now.

May we listen to God's voice...and respond with love...

May we allow the shepherding king to guide us...

This day and always.

O God may it be so...may it be so.