

Are you the King of the Jews?

The dictionary says that a king is "someone with supreme power and authority, the right to command and/or to act. This power rests upon the esteem that comes from character and demonstrates mental superiority recognized by others." If the esteem and respect is lacking or has eroded a revolutionary situation exists or will develop.

By 1789, the founders of our own nation had learned from history that the power of kingship is intoxicating and addictive. They divided that power among three branches executive, legislative and judiciary.

Since his baptism Jesus had realized that he was the Son of God. He grew into this role by using the miraculous powers that accompanied it to heal the sick. And he gained insight into the nature of God and shared this with the common people through preaching and teaching. And as time progressed, he began to realize that he was being called to go to Jerusalem by his heavenly father to confront the religious authorities in the temple with their malfeasance. Jesus knew this could be very dangerous, even fatal if worse came to worse. And in our gospel lesson that's exactly where it was headed.

Jesus had been arrested the night before, abused emotionally and physically and interrogated twice it was now day and this was now a third interrogation. Pilate asked him "are you King of the Jews?" Jesus neither affirmed nor denied he just said "my kingdom is not of this world". Was this response a mixture of fatigue, confusion, and fear? Was he trying to weasel out of the situation without failing his heavenly father? No Jesus' kingdom was not of Pilate's world.

Pontius Pilate was a man of authority under authority. He occupied a certain rung on the Roman ladder of power. Jesus' kind of kingship was simply something he was not capable of comprehending. Because unlike Pilate Jesus' authority and kingship was based upon love not coercive power or force.

At the Bishop's conference, I learned that the Kingdom of God comes into the world

from the ground up, at the grass roots level. The kingdoms of this world are imposed from the top down by those in power.

In his book "The Quiet American," Graham Greene wrote an historical novel about how the United States led itself down the garden path into the war in Vietnam. The story is set in the very early 1950s. The French have not yet been driven out and there are other revolutionary groups at work in addition to the Vietminh, the Caodatists and the Haoes. The two main characters are a London Times reporter and an American CIA operative under US. economic mission cover. They are arguing about the best way to deal with the situation in French Indochina. The CIA man thinks that a massive indoctrination of the peasants in the ideals of democracy will inspire them to fight against both the French and the communists. The London Times reporter disagrees. Speaking of the peasants he says "the only man who treats him like a man is the political commissar (Vietminh). He will sit in his hut and ask his name and listen to his complaints, he will give him an hour a day to teach him. He is being treated like a man, someone of value". The fictional reporter's idea about treating Vietnamese peasants like valued human beings turned out itself to be fiction. They were incited to take up arms to kill and killed and be killed in the thousands. But if we think of Mahatma Gandhi's declaration that nonviolence is not a weapon of the weak but of the strong and how he liberated India and what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr using Gandhi's same method guided by the same philosophy achieved in the Civil Rights movement we begin to see what can be achieved by treating people as someone of value.

If we imagine Jesus sitting in some peasants hut asking his/her name listening to their woes teaching them for an hour a day, treating them as someone of value, we have a situation that looks remarkably like the Incarnation. Why would Jesus do this?

We are made in the image of God and if we want to be treated as someone of value it may be that God wants to be treated like someone of value too, so he asks us to have no other gods before him, to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy and not to take his name in vane, i.e., not to tell an untruth after invoking his name. And he wants us to love our

neighbors as we love ourselves. I suspect that treating others well is the most pleasing sacrifice to god that we can make.

Jesus said "my kingdom is not of this world" the kingdoms of this world function so as to meet the needs of those in power, to increase their self-esteem and wealth by robbing others of their self-esteem, telling them in word and deed that they are worth nothing, have no concerns or ideas worth paying attention to, only fit to serve and obey.

Christ's kingdom is exactly the opposite in purpose and method. He joins the peasant in his/her hut, listens to their struggles, teaches them in word and deed that they are persons of worth to god and to their fellow human beings. We need to realize that our own desire for affirmation is not sinful but is rather a sign that we too are made in the image of god and this is the reason why we are called to love our neighbors as our selves.

God does not demand allegiance through intimidation and demonstrations of power. Rather, in his omniscience and love he displays his character, earns our respect and esteem by coming into our huts, listening to us and teaching us how to share in his power - To be like him and to be workers together with him.

About four weeks ago Monday, the president of the University of Missouri suddenly resigned. African-American students had been experiencing racial harassment. They complained to the administration which did little or nothing. Then one of the students perhaps a graduate student said that he would go on a hunger strike in protest. He would offer his comfort, his health, perhaps even his life in the cause of justice. The football team learned of the hunger strike and proposed to support it by boycotting the upcoming game with Brigham Young University. The coach agreed. The athletes and coach now all had something to lose, scholarships and a head coaching job. But now the university could lose \$1,000,000 if the game was not played. So the university president resigned because he had not lived up to his responsibility. In other words, he experienced judgment. Judgment is not an accusation. It is a truth you see about yourself.

The Kingdom of God comes in from the ground up. God shares his power with us if we are non-violent, if we offer ourselves as an initial down payment or investment and if we seek nothing special for ourselves only justice and righteousness.

Say the words in Verses 1, 3 and 6 of Hymnal #645 The King of love my Shephard is

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