

Good Friday Ecumenical Worship 2010
John 19:16-25
Pastor Tim Koester

Virtually every culture has some kind of coronation ritual –a symbolic way of showing who has the power and authority of “ruler, president or king”. In the United States, we have inaugurations. There are ceremonies, parades, marching bands, parties, and endless news coverage that accompany every presidential election. In the days of kings and emperors, there were even more extensive public displays of pomp and circumstance so that people would know who was in charge - who claimed their allegiance.

In the gospel of John, the crucifixion of Jesus is his coronation. This public display shouts to the world that Jesus is indeed a King. He wears a crown, although of thorns, and an expensive purple robe that only royalty could afford. In John's gospel, Jesus stands before the whole crowd gathered at Pilate's headquarters wearing these symbols of power and authority.

In John's gospel, Jesus carries the cross by himself. There is no mention of Simon of Cyrene so it is clear that the work Jesus does, and the authority that he has, is shared with no one else. Jesus alone is king. Jesus alone rules. The sign that hangs above him on the cross becomes an announcement to the world validating Jesus' claim that he was a king unlike any other in the world.

But what kind of king can he be and what kind of kingdom can he rule over while suffering the humiliating death of a criminal on a Roman cross? What kind of power can Jesus possibly have as he hung helpless, nailed to this object of suffering and death? Surely the powerful ones, the real kings of the world, are the ones who have the ability to enforce their will with violence and death. What greater power can there be than the power to take away life?

The very first readers of John's gospel, like those of us who read it today, know that there is another power at work in Jesus. It is the power to **create life**, the power of **resurrection out of** death. Jesus rules over a kingdom of **life** that death cannot stop. Jesus himself endures death in its fullest power but that is not the end of the story. It serves as the strange, ironic, and hopeful coronation of Jesus as King over all the forces that seek to destroy the good life God has created us to live. Already on Good Friday, the colors of Easter give depth and new meaning to the

picture we have of three crosses, planted in the blood-soaked ground of Golgotha. Already we see Jesus carrying a cross unlike any other.

In every other Gospel, the followers of Jesus are urged to “deny themselves, take up their own cross and follow him”. John does not write those words. Perhaps he wants his readers to know that whatever cross we carry in this life is not our own cross, but the cross of Jesus. It is the cross of victory of death gained by Jesus. It is the cross that reminds us that never again will death, or any of death’s associates, have the last word for us. The God of life has spoken and death has no reply to make.

On this day we remember that this victory over death came at a deep price. It came only after Jesus had taken the full force of death into his very body and experienced the deep pain and separation and senselessness that characterize all death. But from that seemingly powerless position, God demonstrates ultimate sovereignty over all the dark powers in the universe. The cross that Jesus carried was transformed by God’s creative power, into a symbol of victory over the very death it inflicted.

The question for us I believe, is what kind of cross do we journey through life with? **Do we see the cross we carry as our own cross or is it the cross of Jesus?** Is it a cross that weighs us down or a cross that lifts us up? Is it a cross that makes people feel sorry for us or is it a cross that communicates Kingship of Jesus over every force that seeks to destroy life? Let us go forth on this day, journeying **with** the cross of Jesus. The cross, yes of suffering, but suffering for the world so that death may never again rule the day. Let go forth, journeying with the cross of Jesus, faithful to the King who rules over a kingdom of life.... Forever.

Amen.

(After this service, everyone is invited to join in the “carrying of the crosses” through the town. We will end at the cemetery)