

2 Samuel 23:1-7  
Revelation 1:4-8  
John 18:33-37

In the early days of World War II, on the fourteenth of November 1940, a German air raid destroyed a cathedral in Coventry, England, in almost the geologic center of the nation. Three years later, an Allied bombing raid destroyed the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin, the capital city of Germany. The people of each nation eventually rebuilt their respective houses of worship and did so with the same intention and in the same manner. In both cases the ruins of the original buildings were left standing and the new churches were built adjoining them.

The ruins of the two original churches were intentionally preserved, allowing the memory of war to live on. The new churches were built connected to the ruins, demonstrating that war – in spite of its devastation and destruction – does not have the last word. The intention in both restorations was to de-glorify war and to make a statement for peace.

Today we celebrate the last Sunday after Pentecost, also known as Christ the King Sunday. Jesus doesn't get a lot of big moments in the season of Pentecost. Mostly he's just too busy healing, teaching, mentoring those who follow him who will ultimately become our forebears in faith. But today Jesus gets to be, ever so briefly, Christ the King.

When he was crucified, the inscription over him read, "This is the King of the Jews." There was an inscription over everyone who was crucified that stated their crimes. This was done to dissuade others from criminal conduct. They couldn't come up with a crime for Jesus so the one who ordered his execution, Pilate, had the inscription made: "This is the King of the Jews."

In the run-up to execution, Pilate and Jesus had a conversation which is partly depicted in today's gospel. It illustrates the clash of worldly and spiritual kingdoms. One kingdom rules from the threat of raw and absolute power. It is the power that has led to world wars and continues to fuel conflicts in various parts of the planet. The other kingdom rules by disavowing the power of might, and turns to the power of love and forgiveness.

Jesus tells Pilate in this pre-crucifixion interview that he came into the world to testify to truth, which marks yet another difference between the worldly and spiritual kingdoms. In the worldly kingdom one barely knows what counts for truth. On food labels that claim "organic, natural, low-fat, no added hormones:" are we to believe that? Is it true or is it a marketing strategy to gain profit, possibly at the expense of truth? On matters of public debate, which side, if either, has the truth? Jesus says, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." There is no lie here; there is no shading or twisting of fact. The truth is that God loves Creation and everything and everyone in it.

These two kingdoms are not compatible. As people of faith we long for the spiritual kingdom. As people of faith we *belong* to the spiritual kingdom.

This means that we live as people of truth, offering ourselves in surrender to God's ways. God's ways are not my ways. I have to learn God's ways. I have to practice God's ways. I need to be conditioned to act and think from the posture of spirit, not the posture of self. This does not happen overnight. It happens through a steady course of worship and prayer; the love and learning of God's Word. The more we feed from these sources, the more truthful our lives become. The less vulnerable we become to falsehood.

We live as a people who see the Other – the person of difference – as beloved. The Other includes the stranger, the refugee and the homeless, those who have no helper. It includes those who might otherwise offend us because of their gender identity; ethnic background; political views, or because they smell bad. Singling out just one person of difference and finding a way to help him or her honors Christ the King.

We live as citizens of the Kingdom of Christ. This means that God is ever our partner in what we do; it means that we are co-creators with God. The peaceable kingdom for which we long is what we construct through our care of others and the environment. God doesn't dictate what it is we are to do. Rather God's Spirit lovingly inspires in us new actions; new ideas.

The people of Coventry, England came up with just such a Spirit-inspired idea as they saw their cathedral rise out of the ashes of World War II. They began a ministry of reconciliation and they called it the Cross of Nails. It is now known as a vibrant mission of reconciliation with more than 330 Cross of Nails Centers all over the world. All of them bear a cross made of three nails, originally from the roof truss of the old cathedral. When they ran out of nails from the ruins, a prison in Germany offered to provide an ongoing supply from its ruins. A Cross of Nails was donated to the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church after it was rebuilt. And a replica was donated to the Chapel of Reconciliation which forms a portion of the Berlin Wall Memorial.

The worldly and spiritual kingdoms are not compatible. The worldly kingdom will continue to victimize and defraud. The spiritual kingdom will continue to offer hope and a different way. This was powerfully shown by one of the priests of Coventry Cathedral who, just six weeks after its destruction, dared to envision his church as a sacred space of reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness, even while war raged on for another five years. On the wall of the just ruined cathedral, he had a phrase inscribed, which can still be seen today. It says, "Father, forgive."