

“Not What We Expect”

Revelation 1: 4b-8, John 18: 33-37

Christ the King/B, November 25, 2013

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I read a story recently about a woman named Cecile Bechard. She is “a Canadian who visits the United States several dozen times a day; when she goes to the refrigerator or to the backdoor or to make tea for instance. To read and sleep, she stays in Canada. And she eats there too, as she sits at the north end of her kitchen table.” This is not one of those brain teasers where the answer ends up being the son of a doctor who is a woman so she is also his mother. You know that one, right? “Mrs. Bechard’s home is in Quebec and Maine at the same time.” This is because her house was already there in 1842 when diplomats sat down in London to create the official boundary line.¹

Cecile Bechard is the citizen of one country who spends most of her time in another country, while somehow staying in the same place. None of us likely share her experience; however, somehow it may feel remarkably familiar. As Christians, we live in two worlds. Our dual citizenship is more of a spiritual nature. The culture influences much of our decision making. We often make decisions based on the standards that the world maintains, for success, happiness, or prosperity. When faced with an important decision, what priority do you place on that still small voice of God?

As people of faith we live in two worlds at the same time. We perceive the reality everyone else sees but also see a reality that can only be seen with the eyes of faith. This dual citizenship becomes more obvious whenever we elect new leaders. The political machine, which is clearly a significant part of the American culture, uses outlandish accusations and creatively interpreted information to try to influence us to vote a particular way. Even though the election season is over, there is sufficient rhetoric on either side of the aisle to keep us arguing. Our faith invites us to use different criteria to examine the qualifications of prospective leaders. As we enter into this process we can not turn off the faith button. Our allegiance to Jesus Christ informs every decision we make; what coffee to buy, whether to use environmentally friendly building materials in the capital campaign or which elected official will work for justice on behalf of all of his or her constituents.

We have come to the last Sunday in the liturgical year. It is designated as Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday. All readings for this Sunday focus on kingship. That is why we have this seemingly misplaced gospel story that is typically heard on Good Friday. In this encounter with Pilate, Jesus says he has come to testify to the Truth. Jesus has a specific mission. Worrying whether other people call him king is not part of it. He has not come to amass power as the world defines it. He has not come to overthrow the political or religious leaders. He has come to testify to the truth.

¹ Rev. Dr. Delmer L. Chilton, Sermon for The Reign of Christ Sunday, The Lectionary Lab, November 25, 2012.

In our Gospel lesson we see the religious and secular worlds collide. The preacher Delmer Chilton says, “at the trial of Jesus we find Pilate, a thoroughly secular pragmatist; deciding what to do with hard, cold, real politik calculation. And we find Jesus, no less aware of the stark reality of his situation and the cross that stands before him, but also aware of another reality, another ‘kingdom’ to which he belongs.”²

The encounter between Pilate and Jesus is intense. Pilate wonders why this man has been brought before him. What threat could he possibly be to his authority or reign? This country bumpkin may be a curiosity to many, but Pilate does not believe he poses a legitimate threat.

Pilate and the social and political leaders of Judea, and for that matter, most of the people who have been following Jesus, were aware of only one world and Jesus is living in two. He declares “my kingdom is not of this world.” He lives in this world, but he is not of this world. His decisions are not governed by what Pilate says or by what the religious authorities say. Jesus came to establish a new kin-dom. This kin-dom however, is not what anyone expected.

Like Jesus we live each day in two worlds, two realities, two kin-doms. No matter how tempting it may be, we can not retreat from the “real” world with all its pain and suffering, hunger and disease, wars and violence. Jesus calls us to go to those places where we experience the world’s most pressing needs.

Jesus needs us to help usher in the kin-dom of God. As we pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done,” we recommit ourselves to this mission. We seek not the will of my neighbor, not the will of our president or senator or governor. We discern God’s will and then we respond. We are partners in this kin-dom building.

As Christ’s disciples we are all in. We live smack dab in the middle of two kingdoms. This is where we come to seek the wisdom and guidance of God to manage this role faithfully.

Our dual citizenship is not as simple as Cecile Bedard’s. The boundaries for her are fixed; the kitchen is in one country, her bedroom in another. There is nothing she can do to change this. For us it is a bit trickier. So I wonder...what difference will it make if we use paper goods at the potluck dinner instead of washing the dishes? Who will notice if we only pray to God the Father? Will it matter if we call a transgender candidate as our next Senior Pastor? These are the challenges we face as citizens of two kin-doms. We can succumb to that voice that says “don’t bother,” because it is too hard, too risky, or too controversial. Or we can trust that if it is God’s will, all will be well.

In the encounter with Jesus, Pilate wonders if Jesus is king of the Jews. Jesus is not concerned with titles. People say he is a king. If that is so, his kin-dom is like none other. In this kin-dom prepare to be last, prepare to be a servant, prepare to put yourself in harms way for the sake of justice. In this kin-dom everyone has what they need,

² Chilton, November 25, 2012.

everyone is honored, and everyone has a voice. Jesus entrusts this work to us. We are kin-dom builders and the work is not yet complete.

We live in two worlds and the trick is not to become so enamored with one that we lose sight of the other. This happens when we live deeply connected to God. It happens when we trust God to provide our daily bread, when we anticipate God's forgiveness, when we expect God to deliver us from evil. We see the hand of God moving in our midst, holding us in divine love, pointing and gently nudging us in the right direction, filling the ordinary with mystery and the mysterious with meaning.

One of my favorite prayers was written by the Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila more than 500 years ago. It is like the beloved prayer of St. Francis. It bears repeating again and again. I invite you this morning to not only hear this prayer but to experience it as well. I will provide you with simple instructions at the end of each line of the prayer.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, not feet but yours (I invite you to touch your eyes)

Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the world (wiggle your toes)

Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good. (Touch your hands)

Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all people now. (pause a moment)

We live in two worlds. The challenge is to find the balance in our dual citizenship. We agree to live a different way. We are partners. We are in it together. Our mission is to usher in the kin-dom of God, a kin-dom unlike any other. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may it be so! Amen