

## “What is our truth?”

I hope you have your banjos ready because this morning it's all about the dueling kingdoms. Simply put, we have the kingdom of Rome pitted against the kingdom of God, here represented by Pilate and Jesus, respectively.

The scene begins in the Roman praetorium, called the Antonia fortress, located adjacent to the northern wall of the temple complex. How is that for a reminder of where one stands? Despite the prominence of the temple in the resident's of Jerusalem's daily life, the expression of the full power and authority of Rome is right there, unmistakable. It's not unlike, I don't know, tearing down our parish hall and putting an IRS office or a federal courthouse, or better yet the US Capitol there in its place.

So in walks Jesus, having been sent from the High Priest's house, knowing his fate is in hands that aren't his own. Pilate, at best, is amused. At first. Out of the gate, Jesus challenges Pilate with a sly mix of sarcasm and disdain. Pilate keeps his composure, and then things get interesting. Jesus challenges Pilate's notion of power and from where it is derived.

Jesus states that his kingdom is not from this world. Casting into sharp relief Jesus and Pilate's understanding of the exercise of power. I would argue the main difference between the two being truth and fear. Jesus' ministry as he understands it is to testify to the truth. Pilate's job is the exercise of power, mainly by fear; namely, the fear of assured and swift violence. Remember, in Jesus' trial, the High Priests and Pharisees were trying to trigger the Roman response to insurrection. They knew what Rome was capable of; they're counting on it, to be sure, in this case.

Jesus' truth is love. Pilate's truth is fear. That sheds an interesting light on Pilate's question of Jesus, “What is truth?” doesn't it? I'd say the question still rings true to this day. But I might rephrase it a bit. I'd ask you, what is God's truth for us today? Especially in the face of the recent spike in terrorist attacks across the globe these last two weeks. What is God's, truth in the face of fear?

Our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, offers stirring words on fear in light of the refugee crisis and the rampant fear-mongering by some of those who hold

office. He says, “Just as Jesus bids us not to be afraid, we must, in turn, pass those words of comfort to those who turn to us for help.”

But Jesus calls us to go even further: not just to love our neighbors and our kin, but to love our enemies. This is particularly difficult when we are afraid. But even in the midst of our fear we stand on the solid ground of our faith and proclaim the faith in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. In practical terms, this may mean finding strength in prayer, or in our neighbors, or in our churches, or in acts of solidarity with others who live in fear. This is the hope that casts out fear.

The fear is real. So we pray. We go to church. We remember who we are in Jesus.

Our resurrection hope is larger than fear. Let nothing keep us from that hope, that faith, that security in God’s dream for all of humanity. “Be not afraid!”

“Our resurrection hope is larger than fear.” Isn’t that what Jesus was saying to Pilate, and to each of us? Be not afraid. The same message the angel comforts the overwhelmed and terrified Mary. The same message that eases the fear of the shepherds. Be not afraid, God is here. The Lord of Love who is and who was and who is to come (count that as your friendly neighborhood reminder that Advent is upon us next week) will not leave us. Ever. And that is our truth. That is the hope of resurrection. That is the promise of our salvation. That is why we can boldly say, Be not afraid.

But it isn’t easy, I can attest. Having been in London in April of 1999 in the midst of a 3-attack bombing campaign by a right-wing extremist, and the DC sniper in October of 2002 figure heavily on my mind when I think of terrorism and our response to it. I was never too close to either of these events, but I will tell you I will never forget people running, in zigzag patterns, out of grocery stores or crouching behind the concrete end caps while they filled up their car at the gas station, or the anxiety that spread around the VTS campus when one of our classmates was unaccounted for as a result of interstate traffic being shut down. In both instances, I remember weighing staying put or continuing on with life as normal. I am sad to admit it was more stubbornness and indignation than faith that informed my decisions at those times.

And there is the challenge for people of faith, how firmly can we stand on our faith, on Jesus’ truth, when we are endlessly renegotiating our new normal in the face of terrorism of the foreign and domestic variety, racial tension, political

brinkmanship and whatever else may come tomorrow. We are faced with a decision. Will we fully embrace “him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever,” putting on the mantel of service, love, and compassion as active leaders, priests even in God’s kingdom? Or will we cast our lot with Rome and the powers of this world that divide, oppress, and revile in the name of hatred born in fear?

It is not love that turns the back on the widows and orphans, the refugees, those fleeing their own hells for lack of any option save death. It is not love that stirs up anti-immigrant fervor, inciting riots, abuse and the internment of more than 100 thousand Japanese-Americans during the second world war. It is not love that allows oversimplified half-truths, at best, to shape public policy in the name of political opportunism. It is not love. It is not love.

So here we stand. With Jesus and Pilate. Looking at the kingdoms before us. I’ll go out on a limb and give Pilate the final word, “what is our truth?”