

Date: November 22, 2015
 Scriptures: Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37
 Title: Enthroning Compassionate Love

Learn what is true in order to do what is right.
 Thomas Huxley

Today is Christ the King Sunday.
 It is the last Sunday of the Christian Year.
 Next Sunday is the first Sunday in Advent,
 the first Sunday of a new Christian year.
 There is symmetry to the Christian year.
 It always begins with the celebration of Christ's birth
 and ends with the declaration that Christ is King.
 I find it interesting
 that as we Christians
 are affirming these truths
 merchants are hard at work
 trying to convince us of a different truth.
 They would have us believe we are King.
 Believe that we are the center of the world
 and our every need, every desire, every whim
 should and must be satisfied.
 They don't stop there.
 They also try to convince us
 that life's intangibles,
 things like love and joy and contentment
 can be bought and sold.

Today's reading from John posits a truth
 vastly different from the one
 the merchants are peddling.
 Hours earlier,
 while Jesus is praying in the garden of Gethsemane,
 a contingent of men led by Judas
 come and arrest him.

Among them are both Roman soldiers
 and also Jewish policemen
 working for the religious leaders.
 They take Jesus first to Annas and
 then to Caiphas, the high priest that year.
 Both men question Jesus at length.

Afterwards, Caiphas sends him to Pilate,
 the Roman commander charged
 with keeping the peace in Jerusalem.

The very first thing Pilate says to Jesus is,
 “Are you King of the Jews?”

Responding warily,
 Jesus asks Pilate
 if his question is personal or professional.

Immediately, Pilate lets him know
 that he is not a Jew
 and, therefore, has absolutely no interest in Jesus’ identity.

Jesus is wise to be wary,
 wise to test the water.

Pilate’s response lets him know
 that Pilate’s decision will be decided
 by one thing and one thing only ~
 by what is most expedient
 for Rome and for himself.

Understanding this, Jesus speaks his truth
 telling him his kingdom is not of this world.

No sooner does Jesus close his mouth,
 than Pilate asks, “So you are a king?”

If Jesus has a kingdom, he must be a king, right?

Right,
 but as Jesus tells Pilate,
 his kingdom is not of this world.

“Not of this world.”

This statement invites Pilate to consider the possibility
 that there are non- material kingdoms,
 kingdoms beyond the world’s kingdoms,
 kingdoms beyond Rome’s kingdom.

It is as if Jesus is telling Pilate,
 “Think about what you are doing right here, right now.
 You give your allegiance to Rome,
 but there is a kingdom greater than Rome,
 a kingdom that existed before Rome was born
 and will continue to exist
 long after Rome’s glory fades.”

“My kingdom is not of this world”
 is not the only truth

Jesus shares with Pilate that day.
 He tells Pilate one other truth.
 It is the truth
 that has guided his life and his ministry.
 He says to Pilate,
 "I witness to the truth.
 Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."
 Here, very explicitly and unequivocally,
 Jesus tells Pilate who he is and what he is about.
 In scripture, "The Truth" is a metaphor for God.
 "The Truth" refers to the very being of God. (1)
 What Jesus is saying to Pilate is,
 "I witness to God.
 Everyone who is of God hears my voice."
 Yet, Pilate, cynical, expedient Pilate, does not get it
 and so asks sarcastically,
 "What is truth?"

What is truth?
 With their eyes on the bottom line,
 merchants try to convince us
 that we are king
 and our deepest desires
 can be bought and sold.

Radicalized Muslims believe
 jihad is God's will.
 In the aftermath of the Paris bombings,
 fearful people, many who call themselves Christians,
 suggest the door should be locked and bolted
 against refugees from the Middle East,
 especially those from Syria.

Clearly, many people's primary concern
 is themselves.

Merchants focus on the bottom line.

Radicalized Muslims believe
 "...their self-sacrifice gives them the right
 to be merciless and unfathomably cruel." (2)
 Bolt-the-door folks make their safety the highest priority.

Is truth like beauty,
 "in the eye of the beholder?"
 Do we each formulate our own version of truth?

Perhaps in the final analysis, we do,
 but whether we realize it or not,
 our truth is always based
 on an underlying set of assumptions,
 and in the final analysis,
 these assumptions either
 point to God or point to ourselves.

Always, our assumptions either promote life or hinder it.

If we are to live a moral life,
 live as moral beings,
 it is imperative for us to examine the assumptions
 on which our truth is built.

That is exactly what Jesus is trying to help Pilate do
 in his conversation with him.

Jesus is trying to spur Pilate to examine the assumptions
 on which he has built his life.

Thomas Huxley,
 English biologist and early advocate
 for the theory of evolution once said,
 "We learn what is true
 in order to do what is right."

Jesus, ever our good shepherd, dedicates his life
 to help us learn
 what is true,
 what is of God.

He witnesses to truth ~
 the truth that God is God and we are not;
 the truth that love and mercy are God's way with us
 and should, therefore, be our way with all others;
 the truth that mercy is justice in action;
 the truth that nothing is more precious or powerful than the
 power of compassionate love.

Jesus witnesses to the truth of God
 for one reason and one reason only ~
 that we might do what is right.

The way we do right
 is to release compassionate love into the world.

Compassionate love is God's way of making life
 more verdant and abundant for all people.

Let me be very clear about one thing ~
 people who profess God

yet fail to show forth compassionate love
 for all of God's children
 are either terribly misguided
 or terrible miscreants,
 people who spawn chaos in the world.

How very poignant it is!
 Here with end of his life drawing ever closer,
 Jesus points to God
 and God's way of being in the world one last time.

Then, he goes out and shows us the way.
 He enacts compassionate love on the cross.

With arms outstretched,
 he embraces heaven and earth
 and all therein.

Loving God and us to the end,
 he refuses to surrender either us or God
 to the forces that have pitted themselves
 against the truth of which he speaks
 and to which he witnesses.

Truly Jesus is our good shepherd,
 Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

This Thursday people across these United States
 and Americans scattered around the world
 will give thanks for the many blessings
 God has bestowed on us.

It seems right and fitting that
 before we gather with we loved ones,
 before we sit down to a scrumptious meal,
 before we lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving,
 we rededicate our lives
 both to God and to compassionate love
 and God's way of being in the world.

If ever the world needed God,
 the world needs God now.

If ever the world needed compassionate love
 to be the practice of her people,
 the world needs it now.

Always the choice of
 who we are and whose we are is before us.

Never has that choice been more important than it is today.

Beloved of God,
 now is the time.
Today is the day.
Let us choose to witness in word and deed
 to “The Truth,”
 to God and God’s way of being in the world.
Let us in grace and gratitude make compassionate love
 our way of being in the world,
 for it is the way, the only way,
 to freedom and peace for all God’s people. Amen.

¹ *aletheia* Greek meaning ~ God’s very being is truth, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

² David Brooks, “Finding Peace in Holy Texts, *NY Times*, November 17, 2015.