

Rev. Mark Moline
Sermon November 25, 2018 Kingship

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison?’”

Today is Christ the king Sunday, a time for us to consider the Kingship and the Kingdom of Christ. A priest from Birmingham, England once told me, “You Americans don’t really understand the nature of a Kingdom;” I suppose he was probably right. Still, we independent-minded American Christian believers claim to be subject to a King and to be a part of a kingdom, but our King and his kingdom are unlike any other known to humankind.

We have a different kind of King. What kind of King would issue a royal edict: “I was thirsty, I was naked, I was a stranger – my closest friends denied they even knew me, I was a prisoner. --- - Some day the righteous - will ask, “Lord – when was it we saw you hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, a stranger and in prison – --- WHEN?”

Well how about our Gospel reading for this morning --- standing there on trial before Pilate the governor, facing execution. The King of the Jews placing himself under the authority of a Roman governor. Our king on trial for his life. Of course we know the outcome of that trial. ‘Jesus, our King is an ex-con.’ Our King was arrested, tried, convicted and executed as a common criminal. That’s not just some biblical metaphor. Our God’s only begotten child has a criminal record. Our Holy Bible is a criminal record.

That holy and sacred ‘rap sheet’ begins back in Genesis with a man named Joseph who was jailed on charges of attempt rape. There was Daniel and his very hungry cellmates; Samson served time in the prison at Gaza. Several of the prophets went to jail – most notably Jeremiah, - -- then there was John the Baptist, - Paul and Silas, the penitent thief on the Cross - guilty or innocent, so many of God’s people found themselves in jail. ---- Part of Holy Scripture was written in jail.

In the venue of great world religions, all of this is unique to our Judeo Christian tradition, and in our faith - it all culminated in the arrest of Christ the King / Christ the Prisoner! The Church has always been in jail. It is no coincidence that the root word of penitentiary is penitent. A penitentiary was first a small chapel on a monastic campus long before it was a state corrections institution. It was used solely for confession and penance.

It is no accident that a warden was a church officer long before any warden administered a prison, It’s no accident that originally monks were called inmates and of course they slept in cells. I could go on and on — for a ghastly hollow empty shell of an abandoned Christian Ministry still haunts the very foundations of our nation’s troubled prison system to this day.

In this nation, the Christian’s created our prison system. We created it and then got out of the business when the going got rough. I guess it’s not something we’re real proud of, but then our king is an ex-con as our King cautioned us to avoid excessive pride.

We have a different kind of faith, - we have a different kind of King. His triumphant entry into the capital city was not in a bejeweled chariot drawn by mighty war stallions, but astride a humble donkey. He hung out with all the wrong people; he “pal”ed-around with spiritual commoners. He ate with sinners. Our king was highly literate, but was never published. We only know of one writing, and that he did with his finger in the dust.

He was often caught up in conduct unbecoming a king. There was that one supper where he stripped down to his under-garments, got down on his knees and washed his follower’s dirty feet. What kind of royal king would do a thing like that?

Our king worked with his hands in the craft of carpentry. Our king worked with his mind, and the great philosophers have since tried in vain to match wits with him. But primarily he worked with his heart, to found his kingdom upon the love his Father had for his subjects. And it is in that love that we find the single greatest difference between our King and other monarchs the world has known.

Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not from this world, my kingdom is not from here." Like many folks still today, Pilate couldn’t quite grasp - that perhaps there was more going on in this universe of ours than that which we can know and control. Unlike earthly kings, our King does not subjugate us. We are not prisoners.

Jesus explained that, “He came into the world, to testify to the truth.” That truth is God’s love for you. True love means freedom of choice. We choose to accept or reject the love and the Kingship of Christ. St. John Chrysostom said 'Find the door of your heart, you will discover it is the door of the kingdom of God