REDEEMER-KINSMAN RUTH 4; JOHN 18:33-37

Today is a Sunday that is special for preachers, marking the last Sunday of the church liturgical year. That means that next Sunday is the first Sunday of a new liturgical year, the beginning of the season of Advent. I’ve taught you a little about the story of Ruth right before Advent because of the importance of Jesus’ lineage, and Ruth’s part in it. It is important for us to get glimpses of Christ in the old testament so that we can tie the whole story of God’s people together. Through the people, and God’s working in their various lives and circumstances, we start to feel a sense of continuity and an overall better understanding of God’s eternal plan, thus finding ourselves having a part in the story.

For many churches this Sunday has been called Christ the King Sunday. Here, I like to acknowledge it as Christ the cosmic ruler Sunday.

One reference to Christ as king is found in our gospel lesson for today.

Chronologically, we are being challenged a bit. We know the celebration of Advent and Christ’s birth are just around the corner for us in our real time, yet we are studying the trial of Jesus at the end of his life.

The high priest Caiaphas has had Jesus arrested and brought before him for questioning.

The priests were in a pickle, wanting to get rid of Jesus before he caused an uprising and brought the wrath of Rome down on all the Israelites. Their hands were tied by their laws prohibiting capital punishment, so they connived and plotted and arranged to take Jesus before Pilate, a sort of Roman governor for their area.

It was the time of Passover and pilgrims were filling up Jerusalem, another potential for trouble due to the sheer numbers. After a night of questioning and abusing Jesus, Caiaphas transfers Jesus to Pilate. Pilate is a wavering wonder and a posturing bafoon. He runs in and out of his court seven times, first asking Jesus a question, then going out and asking the priests. He doesn’t know quite what the crime is that Jesus is being accused of. He settles on badgering him for claiming to be a king, since that is against the law. No one declares themselves king in Caesar’s empire. Pilate’s actions lead the panicked priests to break their own religious law and declare no one is king but Caesar, in effect denying

God as sovereign.

Jesus meets Pilate’s questions with those of his own. He states that his kingdom is not of this world. Jesus’ kingdom is not a geographic area or a group of militant followers. His kingdom is more of a kindom-that of relationship, a state of being, a way to live. It includes no violence. His kindom functions not by the love of power but the power of love.

Pilate and the Roman empire, and many in our day, will never comprehend this.

Theirs is a culture where violence is an aphrodisiac. Cruelty to subjects is commonplace. Oppression is a must to maintain control. That’s a literal hell of a relationship.

I wonder what changes the world would see if we all confessed our every act of violence, including our thoughts, as our failure to live in Jesus’ kindom. I wonder if we could be changed by the miracle of God’s total reign in our lives, what that would look like.

I was interrupted at this point in my writing by two families in need.

This has been another two week period where there has been an average of three coming in to the office for assistance every day. So I have had a taste of West Liberty. Not the shopping spree that the chamber put on. The behind the scenes nitty gritty of both poverty and generosity. So my keyboard was splashed with tears of gratitude to be in a position to be part of the kindom.

I love this time of year when the community gives and gives and gives some more.

I love that I have a relationship with many who are in need ranging from a once only tide me over, to once a year to get caught up, to dire straits.

Let me introduce you to a mother wondering if her mother can pick up their Christmas box because her due date is Dec. 3. And wondering if she can include her unborn baby on the application to receive a gift.

Or an aunt who has taken in her niece and two children to provide a roof over their heads and childcare who is desperate for milk and toilet paper.

Or a struggling young widow, trying to be well enough to go back to work, waiting 8 months and still not receiving any death benefits from insurance.

Or a dad, laid off, with a newborn, so excited and so wanting to be a good provider.

I feel a kindom with these folks and many others.

And I feel a kindom with the owner of the tattoo parlor whose employees took up a collection of food. And the anonymous person who left three bagsful in the basket. And to many of you who drop off boxes and bags of food and toiletry and cleaning items. Who organize food drives at your workplace. Who will bring in piles of winter wear. Who teach your children to give to others and find joy in the giving. Who entrust me to distribute and provide for folks you may never meet. Don’t stop. The need is so great.

Jesus told Pilate that his purpose was to be truth.

I guess love is truth. Because that is what Jesus was.

But Pilate didn’t know. He asked ‘what is truth?’

Maybe, hopefully, that question haunted him.

As it should haunt all of us. What is truth? Who is truth?

Kindom or kingdom? Violence or love? Provision or selfishness?

In some ways we choose our own truth and in so doing are instrumental in others’ truth. In some ways we are just as guilty as Pilate in crucifying truth because we can’t comprehend it.

As the Thanksgiving weekend is about to end, I sincerely hope it has been one of awareness for you. That you are blessed to be a blessing. That by coming here on Sunday morning you are claiming a kindom and a kingdom the likes of which there is no other.

God reigns. Jesus reigns. Over all the earth, all the cosmos.

As his loyal followers let us realize our kindom knows no bounds. Not of geography, of nationality, of race, religion, or economic status.

Let us recall and speak to Jesus those words of Ruth to Naomi.

Where you go Jesus, I will go. Where you will stay, I will stay.

Your people will be my people and your God my God.

Jesus Christ is our kinsman-redeemer.

He gave his life and his death out of love that we might grow in relationship with him and God Almighty. That God’s kindom might come here on earth.

Thanks be to God. Amen? AMEN.