

An Odd Kind of Throne

This morning's first two readings and the Psalm get us anticipating something big. Jeremiah, the Psalmist and the author of Colossians all talk about the strength of God. There is such power that nations and kingdoms will not be able to withstand the attack of God's King when He comes to mete out justice to evildoers. We get an image of the ultimate "shock and awe" attack. But when we get to the Gospel reading, we see the opposite. The Man whom we declare as King is on a cross. What kind of throne is this for the world's Savior, a throne that was the first century's most humiliating way to die? What kind of Savior is this King who does not command His army to destroy all those who are against Him but rather hangs on that cross of a throne and dies? What kind of King is this who asks His Father to forgive those who have killed Him? The story is not supposed to end like this. It is supposed to end with those evildoers getting destroyed by a Messiah who cannot be killed and leads an army that cannot lose a battle. All who oppose the Messiah are supposed to be crushed underfoot.

Why would those who have been oppressed by the powers of the world put their belief in a person who was killed like a common criminal? What was it about this man Jesus that people would believe that He was the Messiah? Perhaps we have an indication from what He said from the cross. "Father, forgive them..." Forgiveness; for those who have received forgiveness know, it is very freeing. Being forgiven means that we do not have to hide what we have done, we do not have to try to keep secret those things we've said or done of which we are ashamed. Those who have granted forgiveness know how freeing that can be also. Granting forgiveness releases both parties involved in a wrongdoing. Both sides are then able to put aside the tragic event and move beyond the incident. Many times

when we talk about forgiveness and its power to free us, we often think, yes that sounds nice, but does it really work? After all, it didn't work out too well for Jesus. The Romans and Jewish authorities did not have a change of heart after Jesus forgave them, taking Him off the cross and sparing his life. Rather, they sneered at Him and tried to provoke Jesus into saving Himself like He saved others.

To get an idea of the power of forgiveness, consider this:

On the morning of October 10, 2006, a 33-year-old milk truck driver in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania affectionately hugged his two oldest children as they got on the school bus. He made a brief stop at a hardware store before driving his pick-up truck to the front door of a one-room Amish schoolhouse near the hamlet of Nickel Mines. He went into the schoolhouse where he ordered everyone to leave except ten schoolgirls, tying them together. Then as police gathered outside the school, he systematically shot the ten children, ultimately killing five of them before taking his own life. Despite the unlikely setting of an Amish schoolhouse, this incident followed a storyline that we have heard over and over again. What really caught the attention of the press was not the horrible act committed by Charles Carl Roberts IV, but how the Amish reacted to this atrocity. Within hours of the tragedy, Amish spokespersons, including members of the families directly affected by the shootings were speaking of forgiveness. That same evening, there were many Amish visitors who visited the Roberts' home, offering condolences to the gunman's widow, Amy Roberts, telling her to stay in her home, that they had forgiven her husband and shared in her sorrow. The grandfather of one of the victims spoke from his granddaughters' grave saying, "We shouldn't think evil of the man who did this. He, too, is a child of God."

Forgiveness is at the heart of Amish theology. They take seriously the teachings of Jesus about forgiveness, especially about the forgiveness He taught His disciples to pray using the words that we now call the Lord's Prayer. The Amish have repeatedly learned the power of forgiveness and have experienced the healing that comes through forgiveness.

In his book, Forgiveness: A Legacy of the West Nickel Mines Amish School, author John L. Ruth wrote, "What if the religions of the earth's billions would encode an elemental attitude of forgiveness rather than entitlement? What if those tempted to get even would have been suffused by nursery training with the mystery of forgiveness? What if the paradigm of the cross of Christ would become the logic of the human heart?" What would our world look like if instead of only the Amish practicing forgiveness as a central part of their theology, all Christians made forgiveness central to their way of life and relationships? Instead of looking to get even with those who have wronged us, we look to forgive. Forgiving is not a "get out of jail free" card that suddenly makes everything okay and there are no consequences for wrongful actions. Those responsible for doing wrong must take responsibility for their actions and accept those consequences for what they did. But if we approach life with a forgiving attitude, then through granting forgiveness we can realize that we are defined not by what was done to us but by our baptism. When we are forgiven, we get reminded that we are a child of God; we may amend our ways so that we do not hurt other children of God. As forgiveness is practiced more and more, people may become less hateful, less revengeful, less wanting to injure others and strive for the kind of relationships that puts others first instead of themselves. As more and more people practice forgiveness, the cycles of violence where violence breeds more violence becomes broken and we live together in true peace. By participating in forgiveness, we

realize that we are much more than what those doing wrong to us say we are. We are what God says we are.

By using the cross as His throne, Jesus demonstrates a new way of doing things. It is not the way the world had operated where 'might makes right.' Rather it is a way where compassion and forgiveness serve to make people feel like they are a special part of creation. It is in this way, that Jesus really is the King of kings!

Conclusion: In celebrating Christ the King Sunday with the Gospel reading from Luke, we learn that the kingship of Jesus Christ is not how the world defines a kingship. Rather than using weapons of violence to make people do what the king wants, Jesus teaches us from the cross that the weapon of forgiveness is much more powerful and useful for us. Jesus is unlike any king this world has ever known. Rather than being a king who is served and passes judgment, He is a King who serves and forgives. Isn't this the kind of King we should want to serve?

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/t8jUhViyqlA>

Service: <https://youtu.be/4AP16-nJ7bY>