

## King Jesus

Today we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of the town called Caesarea Philippi.

A town named for Caesar, the Emperor of Rome, and Phillip, one of creepy Herod's creepy sons.

And in the midst of that town, Jesus asks his friends, "who do people say that I am?"

"So what?" you ask.

"Does it really matter?"

Frankly, these days, it doesn't seem to matter much.

Because these days, we have too often swallowed the kool-aid that says faith is an entirely private affair.

For too many years, we have accepted the heresy that it's fine and dandy to have Jesus be the "king of our heart" while we continue to bow and scrape and worship the various kings of this world: whether their name be Trump or Putin, Fame, Military Might or Money.

But Jesus is having none of that.

Which is why he asks the question while standing within the city limits of the belly of the beast.

"Who do folks say I am?"

And Peter, impetuous, brave, cowardly, insightful, thick as mud,  
Peter, gets it right!

Jesus isn't just a prophet, although he is that.

He's not just the harbinger of God's full presence on earth,  
although he is that as well.

Jesus is the King of the world, not simply the King of our individual  
hearts.

And if that's true, then the consequences are, of course, enormous.

Because the way of life Jesus invites us into is all wrapped up in  
the Sermon on the Mount.

You know it!

Love your enemies.

Pray for those who persecute you.

Forgive endlessly.

Die rather than kill.

The way of Jesus is on a collision course with the way of Caesar.

In short, if Jesus is King, he's King of the whole world!

Not just in our private lives, but in our public lives too!

So what are the implications for how we are to live in this world?

Paul takes up that challenge today when he appeals “to you brothers and sisters, ..., to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...”

Meaning, that the powers of this world stay in power because they use the threat of death to keep people in line.

That’s why the Romans crucified troublemakers.

It’s why the state in our day and age still retains the power to legally execute a person.

The powers of this world think they are in charge of the power of death.

But if Jesus is King of the world, the resurrected one, the one who defeats death every day, then those who follow Jesus are freed from that power – and can fearlessly confront those who constantly seek to subvert God’s call to unity, compassion and kindness.

That’s why Paul can say with such confidence, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” – because in Jesus, the fate of our bodies and our lives is secure.

We can live and challenge and serve and protest and preach fearlessly because death is done with!

In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describes this very kind of freedom as he is sent to the bitter cold prison camp in Siberia:

"From the moment you go to prison you must put your cozy past firmly behind you.

At the very threshold, you must say to yourself, 'My life is over, a little early, to be sure, but there's nothing to be done about it.

I shall never return to freedom.

I am condemned to die -- now or a little later. . .'

Confronted by such a prisoner, the interrogator trembles.

Only the man who renounces everything wins the victory."

Isn't this what Paul is getting at when he tirelessly reminds us that we have died in Christ?

**Our life** is over!

What we are called to live is a life **in Christ**, which, I know, is a really tough thing to wrap your head around.

It's a tough thing to wrap our head around even though we probably won't be imprisoned or killed.

More often, our courage may be called upon to stick our neck out just a little — and risk retaliation from a boss, or the anger of a neighbor or relative.

For example, let's talk for a moment about racism here in Hawaii, particularly as it impacts African Americans and Pacific Islanders.

While our multi cultural community often prides itself on how well we get along with each other, you don't have to spend much time

with a black person or a person from Chuuk to realize that things ain't so rosy.

And how have we, as a church, addressed that?

Perhaps far too often we pay some lip service to the problem, but, afraid to cause offense (which is terribly ironic when you think about it) the issue dies on the vine.

Jesus calls us to so much more!

He calls us to a transformation that comes when we renew our minds.

A transformation that is possible only when we throw off the fears that keep us wedded to the powers of this world while throwing on the cloak of trust in King Jesus.

Because Jesus is King, we slowly come to embrace the truth that:

"Violence cannot defeat violence.

Hate cannot defeat hate.

Fear cannot defeat fear.

We come to grasp the magnificent truth that God achieves victory through defeat.

Glory through shame.

Strength through weakness.

Leadership through serving.

Life through death.

These aren't truths that are grasped easily – or without much struggle." McClaren, paraphrased.

Not for Peter.

Not for us.

But with the challenge to take up this new way comes a new kind of power.

Jesus says today that what we bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and what we loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

We last heard these words at Pentecost, when Jesus gives to us the power to bind and loose sins, a power we can only truly exercise if our standpoint is on the solid rock of forgiveness, which alone allows us to distinguish the good from the bad and the ugly.

Today, when Jesus speaks of the power to bind and loose; he's not talking about sins, but about the rules and regulations of the faith community.

Just as Jesus reinterprets the rules and regulations of the faith community, not through rigid legalisms, but through the lens of compassion, so he instructs us to do likewise.

It seems what Jesus is telling us is that no church rule or regulation is unchangeable – because the living God is with us and among us every single day.

And because the power of the living God is here in our midst, always and forever, all rules and regulations are subject to change if that change serves human need.

Today there's been a huge outcry from some Christians because singing is now banned in church, due to the pandemic.

But isn't the very core of our faith self-sacrificing love — for the good of our neighbor?

And since this virus is spread by aerosol expressed from our breath, and since that spread is made worse by singing, how can we even think of singing under these circumstances?

To put a finer point on it:

How is God glorified if our worship harms our neighbor?

And when it comes to those Biblical imperatives to sing praise to the Lord, maybe the question to ponder is:

Do we use Scripture to determine what love means?

Or do we use love to determine what Scripture means?

If it's the latter, then yes, we will mask up, worship virtually and continue to pray for an end to this pandemic!

Today we stand with the apostles in the company of King Jesus.

And as we stand in that place, the question asked every day of me, and you, is this:

How shall we confront the needs of our world?

Shall it be with Caesar's weapons?

Or shall we confront the needs of our world with quiet words of understanding?

With warm gestures of compassion?

With gratitude?

With surrender?

+amen