

4. I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life

John 14.1-14

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Asking directions when lost is something that for some reason is quite difficult for a man to do.

How many times have I felt I knew for *sure* where I was heading and in reality was completely lost. This happened most recently a few months ago when I offered to drive Kathleen to get a truckload of Tagro to plant our garden. On the way north on I-5 we passed the Portland Avenue exit whereupon Kathleen said, “That’s the road we need to take.” “No,” I said, “I’ve been out to get Tagro before. It’s the first Port of Tacoma exit.” Then I proceeded to that exit, just sure that I knew where I was going. It was with great chagrin on my part, and a soft smile from Kathleen, when I said, “Oops.” Then I made a turn back toward Portland Avenue and the correct spot, clearly marked by signs.

Recently a cartoon appeared in PARADE magazine in Tacoma’s *News-Tribune* showing a sign at a sales counter that read “Global Positioning System for Men.” A man inquiring about the GPS device was told by the clerk, “It’s the GPS for men – after a while it clams up and lets you drive around without a clue.”

Jesus had been talking to his disciples about his impending death (and victory over the grave), but somehow they weren’t getting it when he said, “And you already know the road I am taking” [verse 4]. Thomas said to him: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How are we to know the way?” It was in answer to this that Jesus spoke the words, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” [verse 6].

In our modern day of tolerance and political correctness, these words of Jesus perhaps leave many persons, even some Christians, aghast. How could Jesus claim such a thing? *All* roads lead to God! Not necessarily. In fact there are many who are taking roads that seem right at the time, but which lead to dead ends.

It is this same Jesus who had the audacity to say to his disciples, and to us, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” who spoke up to his judge, Pilate, who questioned his kingship claim by asking, “Are you a king then?” Jesus replied [John 18.37], “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.”

What kind of images come to your mind when the phrases *Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life* and *Jesus is the King of the Jews* are written or spoken? Perhaps the idea of kingship brings to mind words such as the following:

- Power
- Prestige
- Birthright
- Castle
- Crown
- Kingdom
- Honor
- Laud and praise
- Pomp and circumstance
- Wealth
- Queen (?)
- Princesses and princes (?)
- Subjects
- Wars by legions in armies that would protect and defend

At least those are the words that came to our minds when we were being read to from *Aesop's Fables* and stories like *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and more recently *The Emperor's New Groove*. There were “good kings” and “not so good kings” in all those stories; and this has also been true in our own real world’s history. As world history has shown, there are other words and images that have been brought to mind when we have heard about kings and kingdoms.

- Overthrows
- The seeking of more wealth and power
- Going to war for more land, people and property
- Class and caste systems
- Those who don’t measure up, destitute, or born into lower class systems

There have been many kings, rulers, dictators and other leaders who have participated directly in takeovers, coups, wars and other actions designed to overthrow current persons in power, or to increase their own kingdom’s borders, wealth and power.

Pilate was a man granted rule and governing power by agreement between those in shared power: the Jews and the Roman conquerors. Pilate was in a precarious position sitting in authority between these two ruling groups. He must have felt the pressure since Jesus had been sent back and forth between himself and the other ruler, Herod. In the account recorded in Luke’s gospel (a text upon which we will focus during the Lenten season), Herod and Pilate became friends with each other within one day! This was amazing since prior to the day of Jesus arrest they had been bitter enemies. (Maybe it wasn’t so amazing in that the best way to protect one’s power and kingdom would be to form an alliance with a neighboring ruler.)

The name Herod was not an unfamiliar one to Jesus and his family. It was one of the earlier Herods that feared this “newborn King of the Jews” and sought Jesus’ life. After he had heard from the royal travelers (The Magi) seeking the newborn King of the Jews, the earlier Herod had all baby boys from newborn to the age of two slaughtered in order

to protect his kingdom. This was an act of violence, and an act of fear. Surely this Herod's kind of kingdom is an unsettling one over which to rule; and the earlier Herod obviously feared for his own power as well as the succession of those from his own family who would follow him in power. This king, Herod, and many succeeding Herods who would follow in history, would rule in uncomfortable circumstances because theirs was a scenario of power, wealth and prestige that they didn't want to lose.

Then Jesus' words carry much more than any reference to kingship, rule, prestige, power, or any other traditional term of royal power when he says to Pilate, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Notice at this point in John's gospel that Jesus has dropped the term "king" but not the term "kingdom." He has nothing to say to Pilate about being a *king* that is a ruler or a warrior. This was the biggest thing that Herod and Pilate would have feared – that someone was coming to overthrow them. Jesus only spoke of a *kingdom*; and because of what Jesus said, the only reason for this kingdom was to be a testimony to *truth*.

Pilate said, "What is truth?" and went out to the rest of Jesus' accusers and said to them, "I find no fault in him at all." To satisfy the crowds Pilate had Jesus whipped severely and continued to try to speak to Jesus and the crowds to appease them. He must have been moved either by what he saw in the person and presentation of Jesus, or by his wife who had some bad dreams about Jesus that she shared with her husband; because he ordered that a sign be made and posted on the cross where Jesus would die with the following words in three languages: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Over the objection and outcry of the religious leaders, Pilate said of the sign, "What I have written I have written." In other words, "There are no changes to my declaration. Live with it." He may have ceremonially washed his hands to absolve himself from the pronouncement of death for Jesus, but he would not *wash his hands* of the words of testimony he posted over Jesus' head on the cross. Pilate was not going to back down from this written declaration after saying, "I find no fault in this man." For this reason, Pilate is venerated as a Christian saint in some parts of the world.

And so, Jesus is venerated as a king. The only official statements he made were in forgiveness of sins, raising persons from the dead, and on the cross asking absolution for others who were killing him. The only anger he openly displayed was to clear persons out the temple grounds who were making a profit on selling sacrifices. His sacrifice would be done freely for the whole world within what we now call *holy week*. The only homage he received was a seat on the colt of a donkey and the palm branches of those who were hoping for a military victory he wouldn't produce according to temporary plan – but his would be a victory that would last far beyond that day, through our own era and for the rest of eternity for everyone.

He temporarily had a crown – thorns. He temporarily had a kingly robe – one that was given in mockery and ripped in jest from his body by Roman soldiers when the blood was beginning to dry. He temporarily had a scepter – a floppy reed forced into his hand. He temporarily had a posted title, written in three languages – a sign posted over his head on the cross where he was killed. Why didn't he do something about all this? After all, he was able to do so much that was considered miraculous! The answer comes in Paul's writing to the Philippians (2.6-11) that reads

[Jesus] who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave to him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God [the Father].

What child is this who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherd's watch are keeping?

Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians fear, for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh, come, peasant, king, to own him;
The King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him.

This, this is Christ the King, who shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.
WHAT CHILD IS THIS? (WILLIAM C. DIX, 1865, MELODY: GREENSLEEVES)

Yes, the kingship and rule of Jesus has gone to war to do battle, has overpowered and defeated enemies, and has earned respect and honor. Jesus continues to overpower the Enemy [with a capital E] who would destroy lives. He continues to go to war against sin that can ultimately destroy soul, spirit and life.

Often left untold is the fact that Helen Keller's parents were deeply devoted Christians who desperately wanted their daughter to know about God. Political correctness aside, Helen's parents contacted the renowned preacher, Phillips Brooks, and asked him to tutor Helen in the faith. Afterward, Dr. Brooks reported, "Though she had never heard a word from the outside world about a Supreme Being, she responded, 'I have been wishing for quite a while that someone would teach me about Him, for I have been thinking about Him for a long time.'" Deep within her heart, God had instinctively put the desire for the eternal.

Amen.