

John 18:33-37

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Samantha Evans
November 21, 2021

The Kin-Ship of Christ

Friends, I have to say that this has been a hard and grief-filled week. We have been witnessing the trials of two acts of terror and racial violence. One in Kenosha, Wisconsin. The other in Brunswick, Georgia.

We received the jury's verdict of Kyle Rittenhouse on Friday. And in the coming weeks, we'll receive one for the men who hunted down and killed Ahmaud Arbery.

And the truth, as I see it, is that no matter what the verdicts are, no matter the consequences or lack thereof, there can be no justice. There can be no justice because the system is unjust. There will be no reconciliation, because as a nation, we refuse to confess the truth about our country, its founding and its present.

There will be no reconciliation because we refuse to repent. To turn back to the ways of true justice and goodness. As a nation, we refuse to make reparation and to make fundamental changes to the rule of law.

There will be, there can be no justice because the problem is White Supremacy. It is the air we breathe, the water we drink. It is the founding principle of this nation, and refusing to see it, to confess it, and to actively repent of it, will ensure that we never escape it.

The problem is not the jury's verdict, the problem is a 17-year-old boy walking around the streets with an AR-15 in the name of protecting his nation. The problem is three white men taking it upon themselves to hunt down and murder their neighbor.

The problem is White Supremacy.

I've been feeling lately like there are two options for response. It feels like I'm on a pendulum, uncontrollably oscillating between two horrible places. On one side is despair, where I find myself wondering, "How on earth will we get through this?"

And then when the weight of that becomes too heavy, the taut string of this pendulum thrusts me to the other side, where I feel nothing. Numbness. Here I am unable to feel any of it, because it's just too much.

Have y'all found yourselves on a pendulum like this?

I sometimes try to imagine what breaking free of this swinging path of terror would be like. I wonder, do I desire to find a place in the middle, where I can rest? Perhaps if I were more rooted, heavier, I wouldn't be able to swing so far. I could move, but I would remain close to the center.

They taught us about pendulums in high school physics. Do y'all remember? We learned that in the real world, if you applied a force to a weight on a string, it would swing back and forth and back and forth. And if you were in a vacuum, it would swing forever. But if you're in the real world, where there is gravity and air resistance, then once the force on that weight has been removed, it will eventually swing its way back to the middle.

So there's something to be said about making ourselves heavier, maybe rooting ourselves, so that these external forces can't move us so freely.

But I'm not sure this is the way. Because what happens when the external forces just keep coming? One hit after the other? What happens when our string wears out and we find ourselves further and further from our center? Or we become so heavy that we stop moving altogether?

You may be wondering what any of this has to do with Christ the King Sunday. In order to make the connection, I am going to rely on Old Testament scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann.

In his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, he asserts that the systems of our world from the time of Exodus to today, have been created and sustained by kings, or what he calls the Royal Consciousness, in which the rulers of the day rely their subjects' inability to imagine anything other than their current reality.

Brueggemann says:

Empires, in their militarism, expect numbness about the human cost of war. Corporate economies expect blindness to the cost in terms of poverty and exploitation. Governments and societies of domination go to great lengths to keep the numbness intact.¹

The Royal Consciousness needs us to see our circumstances as inevitable. The rulers rely on the ruled to be overcome with apathy, or numbness, or despair. They rely on

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second Ed (2001). pg.88-9.

their subjects' fear of the unknown and thus inability to imagine another way and refusal to even try.

And the kicker is that the laws and the customs and the givens of the Royal Consciousness are death-dealing. They are unjust. They further inequality and pit neighbor against neighbor, nation against nation. They are bad for everyone, except for maybe those in power. But the ruled over remain stuck, believing that their pendulum is inescapable. That without it, there would be chaos.

For we are led to believe that if we were to say metaphorically cut our pendulum string, then we would surely fly off into the abyss. At least our pendulum path is predictable, contained, ruled by laws we know. Death-dealing laws, sure, but still laws we know.

The Prophetic Imagination, thus, is about the prophets of God who have come over and over again to try to convince God's people that another way is truly possible. That we do not have to swing on this pendulum of injustice, but could be free to move and imagine and create a different system. A different way of being. A different consciousness that exposes the Royal Consciousness for the evil that it is, and gives rise to the ability and the desire to create something new, something just, something beautiful.

I've titled this sermon the Kin-Ship of Christ, because I want us to seriously consider what Jesus means when he says to Pilate, that his kingdom is not from here. That Pilate and others understand him to be a "king," but that isn't quite right, because Jesus is not a king in the way that they understand kings to be.

Kings are those who Lord it over others. Who consume and imprison, who protect the rights of the powerful and exploit the powerless. Kings use violence to control their subjects and deter their enemies. They use coercion and force to maintain their status and their power. They rely on the death-dealing Royal Consciousness that instills fear, apathy, and despair in their subjects.

So no, Jesus is not a King, not in the way the world understands it. Which doesn't mean that he is somehow King of another realm, that his kingship, his kingdom is in another place. No, his kingdom, or as I like to say kin-dom is here, now.

Jesus tells Pilate that he has come to testify to the truth, the Good News, that the kingdom of God has come near. That there is a new reign, a kin-ship, that makes possible everything the world has constantly tried to stomp out.

In Brueggemann's words, this "new king... begins another history, which carries in it the end of all old royal histories." This new kin-ship is marked by "a jubilee from old debts, an amnesty from old crimes, and a beginning again in a movement of freedom."²

Friends, this new kin-dom is marked by siblinghood, cooperation, mutual support, healing and wholeness and hope for all. This kin-dom is formed first on the margins and then brought to the locus of power. It is built not by those who already have wealth and power, but by those who have been systematically excluded, exploited, and oppressed. This kin-dom relies not on despair, or apathy, or numbness, but on compassion and connection, sacrifice and courage.

The kin-ship of Christ enables his followers to cut the string which binds us to our pendulums, the string which binds us to the status quo, to the Royal Consciousness, the numbness which keeps us from believing that another way is possible.

As you go into this week, I ask you to imagine what it might look like to break free from the Royal Consciousness of our day. Imagine what it might look like if we lived according to the ways of Christ's kin-dom. Consider what it would take for you to believe that another way is possible and to cut that metaphorical string which keeps you bound to what is.

I leave you with this Blessing of Courage by Jan Richardson from *The Cure for Sorrow*.

Blessing of Courage

I cannot say
where it lives,
only that it comes
to the heart
that is open,
to the heart
that asks,
to the heart
that does not turn away.

It can take practice,
days of tugging at
what keeps us bound,

seasons of pushing against
what keeps our dreaming
small.

When it arrives,
it might surprise you
by how quiet it is,
how it moves
with such grace
for possessing
such power.

But you will know it

² Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second Ed (2001). pg.103.

by the strength
that rises from within you
to meet it,
by the release
of the knot
in the center of
your chest
that suddenly lets go.

You will recognize it

by how still
your fear becomes
as it loosens its grip,
perhaps never quite
leaving you,
but calmly turning
into joy
as you enter the life
that is finally
your own.