

**“New World Order”****OT 31C-19****Luke 23: 33-43****11/24/19****Rev. Rob Carter****“New World Order”**

While we celebrate Christ the King Sunday this morning, it's important to note that Jesus was far from the first to proclaim the kingdom of God he came to reveal. Throughout the history of Israel, prophets like Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others spent their lives pointing God's people towards God's kingdom. In fact, Jesus wasn't even the first person in his own lifetime... his own generation... his own community to point others towards the coming kingdom of God. His cousin John (John the Baptist) had that particular honor.

We know John actually developed quite the following talking to folks about God's kingdom.

“It's coming,” he told them. “So straighten up and get ready. Every valley will be filled; every mountain and hill will be leveled. The crooked paths will be straightened out, and the rough terrain will all be smoothed over. Because God's kingdom is coming,” he said, “and all will see the salvation—the kingdom—of God.”

Folks who heard John were so amazed by his prophecy, they started to wonder if he, himself, might be the Messiah, the one to be called King of the Jews.

But John insisted, “I am not he. One who is more powerful than I is coming... and he will both judge you and reveal all these things I've told you about.”

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John's proclamation takes up most of Luke's third chapter.

It's not until after that that Luke begins detailing how Jesus' ministry began to take shape. How he called disciples and spent his time teaching and traveling throughout Galilee in order to teach the people about Hebrew Scriptures, and then show them what the truth of Scripture looks like when it's lived out.

In chapter 6, we get a particularly special view of exactly how this worked when Jesus came down from a mountain and began teaching throngs of Hebrews who'd gathered to hear this great teacher.

“Do you want to know what the kingdom of God entails?” he asked. “Do you want to learn how to live amid the very kingdom of God?”

“If so, then you need to relearn what it means to be blessed,” he told them. “You need to reconsider all the ways of this world—the ways by which you live.”

“For in God's kingdom, it is the poor who are blessed, and those who stand alongside them.”

“In God's kingdom, those who mourn—those who know the loss of someone they learned to deeply love who are blessed.”

“In my kingdom, those who hunger for justice, and grieve the state of the world as it is are blessed.”

And in my kingdom, “Those who show compassion and those who strive for peace... they are the ones who know what it truly means to be blessed.”

He explained, “These are the people who are blessed—not necessarily those who live according to the ways of this world, but those who live life directed towards the other. Those who live by the rule of love. Those who live their life amid my kingdom’s economy of grace.”

Then, to give them a living witness of everything he’d just taught them, he showed them... going throughout the crowd and healing all who were sick or broken.

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Throughout all four gospels, we learn that *this* was the way Jesus revealed his kingdom. In the way he taught and touched and revealed in powerful ways that the ways of this world are NOT the way things have to be. Not by a long shot.

But his teachings—his revelations about what real life entails—it so upset “the status quo... that (the powerful of his day) deemed (him a threat to their very way of life.”<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the way Jesus revealed was so different from anything else the world had ever seen, even John the Baptist—the very one who prophesied about Jesus’ coming—he started second guessing himself, sending a team of men to question Jesus if he really was the one God sent down to reveal God’s kingdom.

For crying out loud, Jesus hung out with sinners... he shared a table with tax collectors and prostitutes... he not only talked to but even touched the untouchables like lepers and those possessed. And if that wasn’t bad enough, he insisted—he insisted—on treating women and children and foreigners with love and respect.

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It was all too much for the political and religious establishment. After three years of this growing movement, “his ministry had become so controversial, (so) powerful, (so) world altering,”<sup>2</sup> that the leaders of his day felt they had no choice but to get rid of him once and for all.

So they plotted and schemed and ultimately realized what they had to do.

They had to kill him. But they couldn’t just kill the one people called “King of the Jews.” No. That wouldn’t be enough. Not nearly enough.

They realized they had to humiliate him. They had to make a spectacle out of him. They had to demonstrate to the masses that this rabble rouser wasn’t a king... but a laughingstock. They had to prove that the way of life he proclaimed was a joke, far from anything worth pursuing.

This, they believed, would stomp out the new world order Jesus had been revealing.

This, they schemed, would squash the growing rebellion they had on their hands.

Publicly debase Jesus as much as humanly possible. Torture him. Kill him. And then... then his followers would flee, and the way of life he proclaimed would be no more.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Lynne Westfield, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 4, Pastoral Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

So the decision was made, as we read in our lesson this morning, to crucify him. It was the most public humiliation the world had to offer.

As the Gospel of John tells it, it was all an orchestrated parade. First, Jesus was flogged. Then, soldiers made this fake crown out of thorny twigs and twisted it onto his head. Then, they stripped Jesus of his clothes and covered him in a purple robe, because purple—purple was the color of royalty. They wanted to be sure everyone saw how ridiculous this supposed “King of the Jews” looked amid such humiliating regalia.

As Jesus carried his cross through the street, folks began mocking him. “Hail, King of the Jews!” They hit him. Even spat on him.

And when they got to the place called the Skull, they hung him up on the cross beneath a sign that read “This is the King of the Jews.”

As he hung there, the politically and religiously powerful had plenty of time to further the humiliation. “Hey Jesus, save yourself. If you’re the son of God, if you’re this great and almighty king, then come on, save yourself already.”

Then they turned to others to be as clear as they could.

“Look at this phony. See for yourselves how ridiculous he is. He may have helped a few folks here and there, but he can’t even help himself! What makes you think he can help you? Some chosen one! Some Messiah he is! Is this the fool you really want to follow? Do you really want to adopt *his* ways? Look at him! Look at him!”

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Give the religious and politically powerful credit. According to the ways of the world, their plan was a good one. By destroying the king, his kingdom should’ve been destroyed, too.

But as Jesus had been trying to show them all throughout his ministry... As Jesus had spent his life teaching and healing and revealing to them... life—real life—true life lived amid God’s kingdom goes far beyond the ways of this world.

- It’s why, though they may have killed the king, to this day there are still those who live amid his kingdom, following a leader we cannot see or hear or touch in the flesh;
- It’s why, though they may have killed the king, to this there are still those who live amid his kingdom, living amid an economy not based on the currency of the Almighty Dollar, but on the currency of a grace that never runs out.
- It’s why, though they may have killed the king, to this, to this day there are those who live among his kingdom, in which people are measured by the image of God they bear... and in which the law of the land is the law of love.

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So give the leaders back then credit. They tried to stomp it out. They did their best to protect the status quo and the all the misleading, life-sucking ways of this world.

But our gathering here this morning is proof that Christ’s kingdom *still* reigns... that God still offers a new life, a new world order, really, for those with the faith to see it.

- A new world order that takes shape not through rules or edicts or power or conquests. But a new world order that puts the common good first.
- A new world order that seeks peace by pursuing justice for the powerless.

- A new world order that sees divinity in all of humanity.

While the ways of this world say otherwise, Jesus Christ still lives and reigns, inviting us and all to experience life amid his kingdom, in which joy and fulfillment aren't found in the consumption or accumulation of treasures, but in the giving and receiving of love and grace.

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Now, I realize, we don't always live according to this new world order. Heck, a lot of the time we struggle to see the ways of God's kingdom, let alone live according to them.

But friends, while Christ may have been the one to inaugurate his kingdom, God has entrusted us with its care. It is our job—yours and mine—to both tell and show the world that things aren't necessarily as the world makes it seem. There really is a better way of life... there really is a new world order.

Christ still lives, and his kingdom still reigns in order to save us from the ways of this world. Thanks be to God. Amen.