

I had a strong urge to change our text for today. Because I have decided to use the Lectionary for our Scripture texts for awhile the passages do not always fit the holiday. There is the temptation to change and adapt. As Karen and I were talking at choir we noted the Advent texts are some of the “dark” texts that we don’t often use. However, in using the Lectionary one is forced to deal with portions of Scripture that one might not normally deal with. As I read the ones for today I pondered how I could relate these to our “happy” theme and Thanksgiving. The Psalm was easier to work with.

The Psalmist is singing about our reasons to praise God. The Psalmist is filled with a spirit of praise and celebration. Look at the words he uses to glorify God: majesty, strength, established, everlasting, eternity and holiness. These are just a few of the images he gives us of God. Our God is a steadfast Creator and one who is worthy of our praise. There is a power in the hands of our God over all things.

Now I want you to use your imagination for a moment. Can you see the Psalmist sitting near the ocean? He is watching the waves break over the shore. He sees and hears them pounding on the rocks. Perhaps there is even a storm, and the power of the waves is greater and more majestic than normal. We seem to be drawn to the ocean, especially when there is a storm. There is something about watching the waves.

As most of you know I grew up in Maine where Acadia National Park is located. Inside the park is a formation known as “Thunder Hole”. Here the waves are pushed into a narrow inlet with a cave at the end – even the smallest waves make the sound of thunder as they crash into the cave. There is a warning posted that those who go beyond a certain point stand in danger of getting wet. We would always stand back and watch the “tourist” ignore the sign. The waves were small, how could they get wet? But eventually a large one would funnel in quickly and in a moment there would be a group of very wet and very cold tourists! The ocean temperatures off the coast Maine don’t get very warm even in the heat of summer – you were always assured of a cold shower at Thunder Hole. And we had a good laugh watching!

As the Psalmist looks out over the wind and waves he is reminded that our God is mightier than even the power of the sea. We build sea walls to keep the ocean out and then we rebuild the sea walls to keep the ocean out. The Psalmist knows that our God is in control even in the midst of the storms. Our God reigns over all things, even the wind and the waves. Our God is the strength of our lives even in the midst of the ocean storms. God is worthy of our praise and thanksgiving.

Jesus now stands before Pilate. Pilate assumes he is in control of the situation. After all he has the power of Rome behind any decision he makes. There is no more powerful man in Jerusalem at this time, or so he thinks. He has the power of life and death in his hands. One word and the condemned is put to death. There is no appeal. There is no delay. He has the power in his hands. He confronts with a question concerning Jesus’ power, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Kings had power. Kings controlled armies.

Jesus, in essence, asks Pilate, “Who told you?” How did you come to this conclusion? Pilate is probably shocked by this response, “You are on trial here, not me” (paraphrase). Jesus has been turned over to Pilate for judgment. He is accused of being a king. His crime is one of love. Going two miles when a Roman soldier demands you go one carrying his burden as the law allows. Treating all those he encounters with justice and equality. Are these crimes worthy of death? Is love a crime?

Yes, he is guilty but it is in breaking with the traditions of the religious establishment. He is guilty of turning the image of God upside down. What kind of a king is this? “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“I am a king,” responds Jesus. However the kingdom of Christ is not a worldly kingdom. It is, though, a kingdom greater than Rome’s. It is a kingdom even greater than David’s Israel. The religious leaders and Pilate are thinking in terms of a kingdom of this world. Jesus is thinking of a kingdom for eternity. Pilate is thinking of a kingdom in terms of power and might. Jesus is thinking of a kingdom in terms of love. They need their vision corrected. Pilate’s power is only temporary. Rome’s power is only temporary. In fact any power on earth is only temporary compared to God’s. Their power is in their coercion and strength – as is any worldly power.

The US is the most powerful nation on earth today because of the strength of our armed services. We have the might to back up our position and have the resources to “force” people to do our bidding. We might not like to think of our strength in these terms but we are who we are because of the strength and might of our military establishment.

Pilate came face to face with the truth. The truth is that God is more powerful than Pilate, more powerful than Rome. However, God’s power is in love as demonstrated by Christ Jesus. Pilate stands before Jesus and makes a decision – whose power does he trust in: The power of Rome or the power and majesty of the Creator of all things? Whose story will he believe? The story told by the religious leaders of his day or the story of the King before whom he stands?

Our lives are full of praise and thanksgiving when we discover the truth. Our lives are full of praise and thanksgiving when we discover a God whose power and strength is not in might but in love. We are asked to confront the power of love. Thanksgiving is a time for us to again acknowledge that the kingdom of our God is not built by power and might but rather it is built on love. We understand the power and force of nature – recent storms have demonstrated for us the might and power of nature. But there is a force even greater: Love. We come thanking God for the power of love: A power more formidable than the ocean waves. A power more formidable than the military might of any nation. A power demonstrated by Jesus, the power of love.

May we, this thanksgiving, pause and praise our God for the greatest power ever created: LOVE.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989