

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year which it seems to me should be day to look at the big picture, to tell the truth as much as possible about our world and the promises that come to us through the one called Jesus.

Our news headlines are overrun with all manner of legal matters and violence these days. We all know that, as good as our system might be, law and order does not always equal justice for the accused or the victim. Violence is a reality in our world just as it was in the world of the Bible: folks were thrown into a lion's den, Hagar was driven into the desert to die by a jealous Sarah, Stephen was stoned to death by an enflamed crowd and Jesus was crucified by Rome.

Mistakes are made and a 'not guilty' verdict does not always mean that the accused is innocent. Just as a wrong verdict of guilty has terrible consequences for the innocent. This week we have seen the exoneration of 2 men wrongly jailed for the murder of Malcom X in 1965 and the 11th hour reprieve of >>>>>> because of evidence he was framed from the very beginning.

So on this last Sunday of the year, as we proclaim Christ as King and listen to promises made to us and our loved ones in the book of revelation, we are confronted with multiple uncomfortable and accusatory examples of the reality of violence in our world. Not everyone escapes the lion's den or lives to a ripe old age, and not everyone sees a new dawn as a gift and sign of hope.

In the ELCA social statement on Community Violence we said, "some of the violence in our world is a reminder of our failure to ensure justice for all members of society." Sometimes it is not just random, sometimes violence is birthed by injustice.

I'm sure this is no surprise to any of us. We know that kindness and generosity and gentleness in us is not always returned in kind. We have learned at an early age that life isn't always fair, bad things happen to undeserving people. Or as the Bible says, 'it rains on the just and the unjust.'

We know that each of us has acted and spoken in ways that chose the expedient over the generous, personal gain over common good, and fear (real or imagined) over all. We have been petulant, rash, selfish and disregarded the needs of others.

On this last Sunday of the year, when we proclaim Christ is King, we listen to the ancient people of faith paint pictures of the world to come, the kingdom where Christ reigns. It is a kingdom ruled not by might but by love, where flie flourishes and violence is no more. So today it is good to stop and look at the implications of taking on the name of Jesus, of claiming to walk in his ways, and to seek the kingdom he rules – where grace is the rule of the house and sinners like you and me are forgiven.

We profess to believe in and trust this Jesus – the one who was crushed by Rome, an empire threatened by Jesus' insistence on justice for all in a place where the cross was expedient and love too demanding. Let's remember that the powers that rule this world are not moved by calls to be 'nicer' to one another. If that were so, Jesus would not be standing before Pilate and heading to a cross.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to be transformed: to leave behind old ways and through the power of the H Spirit, to put behind us all the habits and systems and traditions which stand in the way of God's kingdom. We who take on the name of Jesus no longer trust that the systems in place now are right and good and just. We are to remember that although the long arc of history bends towards justice, it has always been human hands doing the bending: working on themselves and in their communities to

change. Justice is possible when our current imperfect and often unjust systems are changed. Following Christ means we too take up a cross and work to move all people forward towards justice and life.

In Bishop Miller's letter regarding the verdict in the Kyle Rittenhouse trial he writes

"we of the Upstate NY Synod confess and insist that anti-racism work.....along with the work to dismantle systems that have denied justice to people due to language, economic class, gender and orientation – is part of the life-long work of discipleship and is not a social or political interest."

On this, the last Sunday of the church year, when Christ is proclaimed as King – displacing Herod and Caesar and Wall Street and all our long standing traditions and habits of injustice.

As Jesus stands before Pilate and is asked "What is truth?"

As we claim for ourselves and for our loved ones that Jesus is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.

As we trust in God's never failing love that washes us with forgiveness and pulls us into a new life and into a new way of living.

As we rest in the assurance that Jesus is the first born of the dead

We recommit to the way, the truth and the life which IS Jesus

we seek the triumph of truth over might, the triumph of justice and unbridled love over expedience and self-gain.

We pick up the word of dismantling, destroying and leaving behind all that draws us from that path.

Imperfect and broken people that we are, we pick up the work of living this truth each day of the year

Christ is King, alleluia.