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Tabor Presbyterian Church
November 21, 2021

John 18:33-37
Reign of Christ Sunday

ROYGBIV

Once upon a time earthlings discovered another planet in our solar system. They named it ROYGBIV. It was like earth in some ways, with continents and beings. But the continents didn't connect, and each one was home to a different colored being, hence the name, ROYGBIV.

The yellows followed one way of living, distinct from the others, with rituals and governance unique to them; same for the blues, violets and so forth. The reds learned to build boats, and it caught on; the peoples of one continent would find out about another, and either want to conquer, intermarry, collaborate, or ignore other continents.

They all had their own way of operating in order to keep their people happy, or peaceful, as the case may be. Until boats, they were each "islands" unto themselves, for better or worse. It would be highly unusual for any beings on any continent to question their way of living. "*We live like we live because that's just the way it is.*" With boats, things got complicated, with comparisons and different ideas. With blues and yellows inter-marrying, it caused all manner of confusion for the greens!

All the continents on ROYGBIV had operating systems earthlings would call kingdoms. Some were more advanced, some heavy-handed. Whatever the case, they all had as much pride in their own as we have in ours.

Their respective values and governance would inculcate certain standards and practices...just like on earth in England, they say, "*God save the queen,*" and the Brits maintain a military both ceremonial in reference to the royals, and seriously defensive of their kingdom. We wouldn't expect anything less. If we were English, chances are, we would value British history, and value those in our ancestral line who fought to maintain it. Not all kingdoms are created equal, of course, but the point is, each kingdom throughout human history was just that, a human-constructed, time-bound, flawed and corruptible system. Even the mighty Roman Empire

with its Pax Romana was not sustainable across time. We can assume the same of the continents on ROYGBIV.

ROYGBIV is light-years away, and, a product of my imagination, which has me play around with the relativity of our time verses theirs, given their configuration to the sun.

The ancient Greeks had two words for time: **Kairos** and **Chronos** time. We keep Chronos time with our clocks; Kairos time is different, it is qualitative, as in moments, it refers to the right time, or the opportune moment. Christ came in Chronos time to affect Kairos time. IF there is life elsewhere, we think of it as embodied, somehow, life means matter, in some way. ROYGBIV may have different Chronos, but I'll take liberty to claim the ethics and the message of Jesus applies to its embodied beings as much as to ours. His message, insisting that any and all kingdoms created by any system or continent are decidedly different from the kin-dom of God.

Most established kingdoms require an offense and defense, armies and rulers to maintain order and compliance; not so with the kingdom of Jesus. Jesus is clear with Pilate that **he wasn't challenging Pilate's kingdom as if his own kingdom - of heaven - was one among many.**

The two kingdoms they represent are not different in degree, style, or might. The Roman kingdom and the kingdom Jesus embodied are a difference of **kind**. We are still learning this, in America, with armed people claiming to want power in the name of Jesus.

Pilate represents what Jesus came to counter. Pilate's rule - his kingdom - *did* out-muscle Jesus, but the kingdom Jesus represents has the last word, because its truth, its values, don't end. He doesn't end.

Other kingdoms try to promise peace, but do so through means that include scapegoats or the abuse of some to support the few. The Exodus story, with its emphasis on freedom, renders the kingdom of Egypt unethical because the well-being of Egyptians came at the expense of the Israelites.

The kingdom of heaven Jesus embodied indicts any and all enslaving systems — any systems that would treat blues better than reds by virtue of their place, appearance or history. We are taught to think our kingdom

is better, and I happen to think our system, fragile as it is, is superior to other systems, but that doesn't make the occupants of our American system BETTER than the Iranians or the Hungarians, the Hutu or the Peruvians. Once we go down that road, believing we are **a difference of kind**, violence gets justified. And not just throwing stones or missiles. Think of the violence of the tongue, the violence of derision and threat, and shame.

One feature of our story today stands out - the total refusal to entwine the way of Jesus with violence. He would rather die than hint as much. And let's be clear that he didn't want to die. He died because Pilate's type of power is no illusion!

What **is** an illusion is believing the quest for power will bring satisfaction, peace or prosperity. Only love secures those. Here's the zinger: The God of Jesus Christ relinquishes power, and in so doing, reflects power. Divine power — fueled by mercy, restraint, sacrifice, and humility.

There has yet to be a kingdom that can function solely on compassion, forgiveness, humility, regard and love. If Jesus wanted to build a kingdom, and be the head of it, wouldn't he have done so by now? That's what the "deceiver" in the wilderness offered him. His kingdom doesn't need to be built, it already **is**; his kingdom needs people to believe in it and then live into it.

After over 2,000 years, we've only taken baby steps in understanding this, much less doing it. The kingdom of heaven doesn't seek power at all. It **is** power, by virtue of its love. Most forms of power exerted by people reveal enormous insecurity. Power in service to control is a denial of love. Said in the reverse: it is a denial of love when power exerts control.

Human or ROYGBIV-created systems will reflect the beings who create it. The divine kingdom reflects the divine who created it.

For those who aspire to the heavenly kingdom, we show our allegiance to it as if we are yeast or salt. We don't take our Christianity and make a government of it. We allow the kingdom that is in us to shape how we relate to the kingdoms in which we find ourselves. Invariably, power-hungry people lord it over others when they are given the chance at earthly power.

When we baptize, when we partake of communion, when we gather in reverence, we consent to the reality of Christ's kingdom, already at work. We hope we are like a strong cup of English tea, steeped enough in these Scriptures, in the love of Christ ENOUGH to say to our inner voice, "*put away your sword,*" to say to our inner demons, "*get behind me, Satan,*" to say to our aggressors, "*Here's my other cheek.*"

This bold instruction, to turn the other cheek, doesn't welcome or condone violence. It shows the perpetrator of violence, someone like Pilate, that *the ethics of the kingdom of heaven* preclude acting in kind. To put it another way, don't become what you hate.

"Pilate, do to me what you may, call me what you will, but my kingdom, beyond Chronos, rooted in love, will continue to spread my message, long after you're gone." We, gathered here, are living proof of that.

Next Sunday is Advent, the beginning of the Christian year, which makes this the last Sunday in the Christian year. The lectionary gives us this exchange with Pilate. The mere mention of Pilate foreshadows the impending trauma awaiting Jesus. We will get to that many months from now as Lent leads us to Easter. Trauma backdrops a lot of our Christian stories, even the Christmas one, with the slaughter of the innocents. The Gospel meets every instance of trauma with a firm retort — it will be overcome! The trauma coming to this peacemaker Jesus **will be** overcome.

I preach to your head and maybe your heart, but baptism, communion and music connect you to the truth your *body* needs to know. In our *bodies* we are redeemed. The kingdom of Heaven is not **of** this world but it is for this world, in our bodies, and every body, even a green one!

Amen.