

“The Men Who Would be King.”

People love pairs. For example, good and evil, rich and poor, winner and loser, sweet and sour, up and down, cat and mouse, and so on. However, pairs do not have to be opposites they can be partners. For example, peanut butter and jelly, cookies and milk, fish and chips, green eggs and ham, and bow and arrow to name just a few. I am sure that we can name a myriad of pairs if we put our minds to it.

You may recall from earlier sermons how a common biblical trope is “a man had two sons.” Do you remember some of the pairs of sons in the Bible? [Listen for Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Essau and Jacob, Simon and Andrew, James and John, the two sons in the parable of the Prodigal Son]. The Bible finds pairs of sons compelling. Most of the time the pairs are set up in opposition to each other.

While it is not obvious at first glance, today’s Gospel readings give us two, albeit unrelated, opposing sons. In the action of the entry into Jerusalem and in the crucifixion, we have two kings. The kings are Jesus whom Pilate labels the King of the Jews and the Emperor of Rome who is the king of Rome. These two are also referred to as sons of God. Jesus is the true Son of God while the Emperor Cult insisted that he was a son of God. They are not going head-to-head as so often happens in the Bible, but the conflict is there, nonetheless. Indeed, the first believers in Jesus knew exactly what they were doing when they called Jesus the Son of God. They were challenging the cult of the emperor, imperialism, and Roman Authority.

By comparing these two kings and sons we see a dramatic difference in kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. One king has a large army, and the other king has a ragtag group of mostly poor followers. One rides in a chariot, while the other usually walks. The one time he rides is on a donkey. One uses intimidation and military power to subdue people. The other liberates people from disease, sin, and death. One kills the other gives life. One claims he is the son of God by virtue of his place in power structure, while the other is revealed as the Son of God by his teaching, preaching, and miracles.

When the army of the emperor enters Jerusalem, the point is to intimidate and suppress. I doubt many people shouted for joy. When the Jesus enters Jerusalem, it is in humility. His followers are a small band of folks. He is praised by people who have awaited his arrival with hope. The minions of the Roman governor are fearful of what Jesus might do. They use the power of the state to kill him. He will go peaceably to his death knowing that death cannot kill the love he has brought into the world. His teaching will live on and on. His teaching will take the murderous symbol of the empire and turn it into a symbol of love, peace, and justice. The cross of Christ will last long after the empire crumbles.

The contrast is stark. The true Son of God comes in love. He cares for all of God’s people not just the powerful, wealthy, and well-connected. The

The Rev. Eugene LeCouteur  
Emanuel Episcopal Church  
Middleburg, Virginia

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emperor and his agents such as Pontius Pilate wielded power cruelly to maintain the Pax Romana; a peace that was only advantageous to Rome and its rulers. Jesus called into being a new order in the Kingdom of God. The peace of that Kingdom was the peace that passes all understanding. A peace where all people live in harmony and work together for the benefit of all and not just a few. It is a radical idea and one that got Jesus killed as an enemy of the state.

But God had one more card up the sleeve. That card was resurrection. The state and the cruelty of this world and the corruption of the human mind and heart can judge, condemn, and even kill, but it cannot keep God's word from prevailing. As the introduction to the Gospel of John reads, "What has come into being in [Christ] was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it."

If we keep the light of the Son, the true Son of God in our hearts the devious, cruel, and hateful forces of this world cannot ultimately triumph. There may be many ragtag entries into the holy city that culminate in the apparent triumph of darkness, but they will always, always be overcome by the light of the Son of God, a light that the darkness cannot extinguish.