

Christ the King     B     Nov. 22, 2015

Jesus stood completely helpless before Pilate. Jesus had no weapons, no soldiers, no legal rights, no one to speak for him. Pilate had 3000 soldiers at his command, and behind them, the might of the Roman Empire. Pilate could execute anyone he chose, at any time—and he did. God stood before Pilate that day. Pilate killed Jesus, who was God. No one could stop him. The execution of Jesus was the greatest evil, the worst moment in human history.

We know what became of Jesus. On the Sunday we call Easter, he was first seen by Mary Magdalene, then by the eleven Apostles, then on the way to Emmaus. Again and again the Risen Jesus appeared. And later, he was present in the Breaking of Bread. One hundred generations later, Jesus is here this afternoon/morning—in his Word, in the Eucharist, and in our midst.

And what became of Pilate, he of 3000 soldiers and the Roman Empire? Where is Pilate now? Pilate was too cruel even for Rome. Six years after the death of Jesus, Pilate was called back to Rome, where he disappears from history. In 1961, a stone was discovered in Israel; it had been used in an ancient staircase. The inscription talks about a “Pilatus” building a temple in honor of the emperor. But no one would remember Pilate without the four Gospels and his role in the death of Jesus.

And what became of the almighty Roman Empire? 400 years after Pilate, the western Roman Empire had been completely overrun by invaders. What remains of the great Empire? Aqueducts, theatres, harbors,

pieces of temples: the soldiers of the Empire have been replaced by tourists taking selfies in front of temple ruins.

Powers seem to come and go, eventually replaced by the next army, dictator, prime minister, or president.

Jesus has a different army, with different weapons. He refuses hate or revenge, but instead heals and forgives—and teaches us to do the same. His kingdom wins each time that we are kind to someone, each time we overlook a failing, control our temper, refuse to spread gossip, give of ourselves, pray for our persecutors.

Because, how can peace and respect come to Paris or Brussels or anywhere else, unless it is already in our own hearts?

In a few moments, we will all pray “Thy Kingdom Come.” Risen Christ, may your kingdom to ISIS, yes, and to all others who would do violence in the name of religion. And may your kingdom come to our great nation, now polarized in so many ways. And Jesus, may your kingdom come to my own heart, casting out fear and hate and all the other weapons I still cling to.

And some day, Christ the King will come in power and glory. The struggles will be ended. No army will resist him. Evil itself will scream in terror. Someday, there will be new heavens and a new earth. May it be so. Come Lord Jesus!