

Good Friday 2024: "The Kingliness of Jesus and the Lowliness of God"
March 29, 2024
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"...[T]his [Passion story] speaks not only of the kingliness of Jesus but of the lowliness of God."¹ The kingliness of Jesus.... Like how? Well, the soldiers mock Him by planting a **crown** of thorns on His head and throwing a **scarlet** robe over the tortured flesh of His back and shoulders, torn into tatters by the cat o'nine tails, a whip studded with shards of bone and metal. They think their crude and cruel sarcasm is funny as they ridicule our Lord, thrusting a reed into His hands as a wannabe scepter, fake-kneeling before Him and chortling, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Pilate composes a message for the placard to be nailed to the cross, a sign the Romans call a titulus, a title, a headline over the head of the executed, letting everyone know what God-awful crime he committed to deserve such extreme punishment and agonizing death. The shorthand is INRI. The longhand is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It's all **wrong**, right?? We know the truth! He's innocent, not guilty, holy, not hellacious, the Son of God, not some spawn of Satan. And most importantly, we know the **paradox** of the whole thing: what Pilate and the soldiers, the chief priests and legal experts voice as sarcasm is actually truth.

We also know:

*⁴ ... he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases...*
*⁵ ... he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed. (Isaiah 53)*

And in this we see "the lowliness of God." St. Paul puts it this way:

20 ... we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21, NRSV)

Or in the contemporary rephrasing we find in *The Message*:

We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you. 21 How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21, The Message)

St. Luke portrays Jesus as the friend of sinners right up to His dying breath.

Remember “the good thief” hanging on a cross beside Jesus? He scolds the guy on the other cross for mocking Jesus, and reminds him they’re only getting what they deserve for their crimes, but:

“...this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” 43 He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23)

Jesus is regal. In St. John’s Gospel his crucifixion is more an **enthronement** than an **execution**. Remember Jesus’ words to His disciples that we heard just a couple weeks ago?

32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Just to be sure we don’t think of the “lifting up” as Jesus’ ascending after the resurrection, the evangelist adds:

33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. (John 12)

The kingliness of Jesus and the lowliness of God.... To be lifted up on the cross and from that vantage point to raise the criminal hanging beside him from earth to heaven.

In ancient legends and even in some modern-day ones, kings have the gift, the power of healing. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn, son of Arathorn, saves Frodo from the fatal poison of a morgul blade by applying athelos, kingsfoil, to the wound. Our King, our Lord Jesus, also heals. “Healing” is a synonym for salvation. Our Savior is the Healer of our

sin and of every form of soul sickness. In lowliness and humility He takes our sin and soul sickness upon Himself and lifts it on high. He has to get close to do it, though. He has to take our flesh upon Himself. He gets right inside our skin through the Incarnation.

British author and woman of faith Evelyn Underhill wrote a poem called *Immanence*. This verse speaks of both the kingliness of Jesus and the lowliness of God, and calls to mind the Last Supper footwashing we heard about last night:

I come in the little things,
 sayeth the Lord:
 My starry wings I do forsake
 Love's highway of humility to take:
 Meekly I fit my stature to your need.

In beggar's part about your gates
 I shall not cease to plead –
 As man to speak with man –
 Till by such art
 I shall achieve my immemorial plan,
 Pass the low lintel
 of the human heart.

No less will do for our Lord, our King, than to stoop low enough to “Pass the low lintel of the human heart,” **our** hearts, **your** heart, in particular. [Pointing to the crucifix:] “Behold thy King!”

¹Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark (Interpretation)*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1983), p. 274.

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