

“The Bible: Jesus Is Lord”
Matthew 16:21-23

Today we are exploring what it means to follow the way of Jesus and to proclaim him as Lord of our lives. Our language is often limited because of our personal associations. When we hear the word Lord, we may think of someone with coercive or violent power. Just like when you hear the words “Priest” or “Pastor,” we may have our previous experiences limit our views. British Anglican Vicar, John Davies, found a good way to tell people about his job as a pastor. He tells about a time on a plane when he shared what he does for a job. “I sat next to this lady on an aeroplane at Heathrow airport and I said, ‘Hello’, and she said, ‘Hello.’ Then I said to her, ‘Where are you going?’ and she said, ‘I’m going to Singapore.’ And she said to me, ‘Where are you going?’ and I said, ‘I’m going to Australia.’ I said, ‘What do you do?’ and she told me; then she said to me, ‘What do you do?’ and I said, ‘Well. I work for a global enterprise.’

She said, ‘Do you?’ I said, ‘Yes I do.’ I said, ‘We’ve got outlets in nearly every country of the world.’ She said, ‘Have you?’ I said, ‘Yes we have.’ I said, ‘We’ve got hospitals and hospices and homeless shelters,’ I said, ‘We do marriage work, we’ve got orphanages, we’ve got feeding programmes, educational programmes.’ I said, ‘We do all sorts of justice and reconciliation things’. I said, ‘Basically, we look after people from birth to death, and we deal in the area of behavioural alteration.’ She went, ‘Wow!’ And it was so loud, her ‘Wow!’, loads of people turned round and looked at us. She said, ‘What’s it called?’

I said, ‘It’s called the church...have you not heard of it?’

And that’s it, really, isn’t it - if we are a follower of Jesus then we are part of a global enterprise. But not only is it global, it’s intergalactic, because it includes everyone that’s gone before us.”

So instead of giving a definition or a word for the job, this pastor focused on the mission and actions of the Church. That is what the Gospel writers tried to do when they wrote about the Lordship of Jesus. During that time and in that culture, the word Lord was to show dominant power like that of the emperor and other rulers. Therefore, it would have been natural for people to question how Jesus could be Lord if he was executed and thus lost according to the powers of the world. Even his resurrection was based on the faith and witness of his followers, nothing more. The invitation of the Gospel writers was to help people follow Jesus’ way of life.

And so when the Gospels tell the story of Jesus, they try to show how the Lordship of Jesus was based on the values of the Reign of God where the lowly are lifted up and the powerful are brought down so that all may experience the healing power of love. And the key to really proclaiming Jesus as Lord was following his footsteps of love.

This week’s Bible reading is taken from the words of Jesus about his upcoming crucifixion. Jesus in this passage does not sugar coat anything about this path. In fact, Jesus makes it sound really scary. This was a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew from Jesus’ ministry in Galilee to Jesus’ ministry as he prepared to go to Jerusalem. What Jesus

shares with his disciples is his call to suffer and face the oppressive powers of the Roman Empire and its stooge government and clerics in Jerusalem.

Jesus was going to suffer for the sake of love. His teachings and movement would become such a threat to the dominant Lords of that time, that they would have to eliminate him as a threat. I love Peter's reaction. Peter was still operating under the norms and lordship of violence. He was ready to fight for Jesus. In fact, later on when Jesus was getting arrested, one of his companions, most likely Peter, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. And when Jesus was arrested, fear so dominated Peter's heart and mind that he ended up denying him three times. The Lordship of Jesus was very hard to accept for Peter and it is still hard for many of us. Peter had to experience the death and resurrection of Jesus before he was truly transformed to the way of Jesus.

It is easy to think of our love for Jesus in theoretical or theological ways. Who would not admire someone like Jesus? It is like admiring someone like Mother Teresa. It is much harder to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. When we proclaim Jesus as Lord, we have to be able to say that our security, our fears, our worries, our sense of control, our violence, our power, our greed, our shame, our guilt, and our ambitions are not Lords over us!

Yet, when we follow the way of Jesus and fully accept his "upside down" values of life, we would find true life and fulfillment. For three years Jesus worked with his disciples to help them reach deep within their souls to find their inner strength for the journey of life by the values of love. This included sermons, teachings, social interactions, spiritual practices such as fasting, and a lot of prayer together. For three years they lived together and were taught the ways of the Spirit. They had to walk the walk each and every day until it became second nature for them. They would not have been ready for the power of his death and resurrection unless they had spent those years walking with him each day.

Rev. Kathi McShane uses this blessing with her congregation. It speaks to what happens when we truly allow Jesus to be our Lord:

May God bless you, keep you, be gracious to you.
May God give you grace never to sell yourself—or God---short.
Grace to risk something big for something good.
Grace to remember that the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth,
And too small for anything but love.
So may God take your mind and think through it.
May God take your lips and speak through them.
May God take your hands and do good with them.
May God take your heart and set it on fire.

Another way of putting it comes from our Lenten reflection book *A Story to Tell*, "Jesus meets us in the world as we know it and calls us into the world as it could be – a world where we fish not for the healthiest, biggest, or brawniest, but for the sick, tossed-aside, and undesirable. We fish not for profit, but to do the work of accompaniment that allows all to flourish."

Lectio Divina:

Matthew 16:24-26

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

Amen.