

In the name of the loving, life-giving, and liberating God who is blessed Trinity.

One month after Chris and I got married, we moved from Georgia to Waco, Texas, so that both of us could attend seminary. We ended up living in Waco for 13 years. During that time, there was a street in Waco called Holman Avenue that I didn't drive often, but I knew where it was. We'd been living there for about six to eight years when I mentioned the street to Chris in passing. I don't even remember what we were talking about, but I said, "Holman Ave." And he stopped, looked at me, and said, "Do you mean Homan Ave?"

I told him, "Absolutely not. There is definitely an 'L' in that name." We went back and forth for a while, both of us convinced we were right. A few days later, we drove by the street. I was determined to prove my point. But as I stared at the sign, I had to admit the truth: Chris was right. It was Homan Avenue. For years, I had been misreading it, insisting there was an "L" that simply wasn't there. I could see the sign in my mind's eye, bold and clear—but I was wrong.

On this Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, the last day of the Church year, we hear Pilate's conversation with Jesus before Jesus is killed. Pilate wants to know why Jesus is standing there before him. Jesus has been charged with sedition against Rome, claiming that he is King in defiance of Caesar, so Pilate needs him to answer the question, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

In John's Gospel, Jesus has never met a straight answer, so of course, he skirts the question, and much has been made of his first answer, "My kingdom is not from this world." Most of us think of the Kingdom of God as entirely separate, often placed in heaven, realized after our life here on earth. We hear, "My kingdom is not OF this world," but what Jesus actually said is subtly different: "My kingdom is not FROM this world." The distinction matters. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The vision of the Christian life is one in which God's love is entering the world now. We are not drawn away from this life. We are drawn deeper in.

Now, that doesn't mean that God's kingdom maps perfectly onto any of our kingdoms. In fact, it emphatically doesn't. But all that Pilate hears is that Jesus does have a kingdom, "So you are a king?"

Jesus' response really stuck out to me this time: "You say that I am a king." You would call me king. That is the only word we have for what Jesus is, but it's not really the right word. God's kingdom isn't like the kingdoms we know. God's

kingdom is not from this world, but it is in this world. We would call Jesus king, but Jesus isn't like any king we've ever known. To start, he is standing before Pilate about to be put to death, and he will not raise a hand to anyone.

But Jesus isn't done there. His answer continues: "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." Truth feels in short supply these days. In this information era, there is so much to sift through, and so many lie for any reason or no reason at all. We don't get to hear Pilate's jaded response in our reading today. When Jesus makes his declaration, Pilate replies, "What is truth?"

Those in power, like Pilate, know they can shape the truth. Some leaders might start with good intentions, but too many of the world's leaders lose sight of humanity. Many make decisions they hope to be good for one group or another, but they're blinded by distance, special interests, or pure self-interest. This is part of the human condition. We are not meant to rule each other as we do. We fall short. We mess things up. We all read signs wrong.

That sign I told you about at the beginning, Homan Ave? We had Google Maps then. We looked it up the day Chris told me I was wrong, and I could see the street clearly labeled Homan Ave, but I wouldn't believe it then. I couldn't believe it until we drove past that street sign that I swore said Holman and saw with my own eyes—it said Homan.

Truth is devastatingly simple. Kingship, as we have set it up in its many iterations, is not how God rules. God brings us together in communities. We still place hierarchies in these communities because we are human, but God asks us to live in a way that would lead us to consider those around us. Jesus came and emptied himself of power. He sat down at tables, breaking bread, sharing life, bringing wholeness. God did not have to come in the form of a human to live and eat with us. God could have come as God and, with a snap of the fingers, set everything right, put everyone in their place, but that's not the type of king God is. God is love, and love brings healing, wholeness.

I won't tell you that following in the path of God's reign is easy. Right now, Julian has entered the stage where he wants certain things, but he either can't do it or can't get us to understand what he wants. And so he does what all toddlers do—he throws himself on the floor and screams. Often, it is something small—he can't get the bigger cup to fit inside the smaller cup. In that case, the truth is devastatingly simple: the big cup will never fit in the small cup. But that truth means nothing to Julian, kind of like the sign I wanted to say "Holman."

Julian is still learning—I didn't have that excuse—but as a parent, it is on me to patiently show him the truth again and again. It is tiring. It is hard work, but it is the work of love. We are each called to this repetitive, frustrating, holy work of love. The task can feel daunting, but it is the work our King leads us to do, and in that way, it is full of hope.