We have a great vestry and wardens here. And I’m going to do a little imitation of one of them. Hopefully you’ll recognize which one and when you do play along.

I say, “King of Kings”

You say, “Poor Little Mary’s Boy.”

I say, “King of Kings”

You say, “Poor Little Mary’s Boy”

I say, “King of Kings”

You say, “Poor Little Mary’s Boy.”[i]

Thank you, Pam, for letting us do this. The point is that Jesus is the King but the one with a crown of thorns, one who suffered to make life better for us, one who was willing to be meek so that we could be great.

In this conversation between Pontius Pilate and Jesus, in this back and forth, we have an irony of two people talking past each other because they have different worldviews of what constitutes kingship. Pilate, who secular society deems a ruler, is really the prisoner because his claim to rule is only as good as his ability to appease the crowd. Jesus, the prisoner, really is the ruler. I invite you to read the passage that follows in Chapter 19 when you get home. Because the writer of the Gospel of John drives home this irony of this suffering servant king in the interplay of this conversation we just read and what follows so that in his version of the trial and crucifixion we have elements of both a Roman trial and elements of a Hellenistic consecration of a king. The Roman trial proceeds with arrest, charges, examination (which is what we see here), and verdict, followed by a similar pattern again in Chapter 19 -- warning, charges, examination and verdict and sentence. Consecration of kings in that time followed these steps -- crowning and homage, proclamation, acclamation, enthronement n the judgment seat, naming and title and royal burial. In Chapter 19, soldiers dress Jesus in a royal robe and bow in mocking allegiance to him, proclaiming him king of the Jews. The accusers acclaim him the Son of God. Then Pilate places Jesus on a judge’s bench and writes King of the Jews to be atop his cross. Later, Jesus is buried in a new tomb with a mixture of myrrh and aloes, befitting a king.[ii]

In our modern world, we also see the same conversation between the secular kingdom and the sacred one. The secular kingdom values power, wealth, being of the dominant culture. People who are meek often are trampled, those with kind dispositions swallowed up by those who would do anything for a quick buck. The secular kingdom is ruled by powerful people who are afraid to seek justice if it means facing down an angry mob, those who turn a blind eye to human suffering. The spiritual kingdom values justice, kindness, and love. It values being willing to lay down your life to guarantee the salvation of others. In God’s kingdom the meek inherit the earth, and everything the secular kingdom did to humiliate the meek makes their enthronement more secure in God’s kingdom.

The same conversation exists in our own hearts, too, as two competing forces discourse with each other. The secular force within us wants that power or that new material good or that promotion. Something within all of us is afraid to stand up for what is right if it is costly. Sometimes we all are blind to human need. On the other hand, the spiritual in us loves and has the capacity to love greatly. The spiritual in us yearns for God. Two different kingdoms are in dialogue within each of us.

Our call is to strive to live more within the kingdom of Christ; to do so we need to call upon Jesus every day – to spend time with Him, to seek the help of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is identified by its source and strength in God. When we dwell within that strength we are living in God’s Kingdom. When we live in God’s Kingdom, we find we can handle the difficulties that emerge from that other kingdom. We find we can better deal with the hurts from others, the emptiness that comes from having power but lacking love, the struggles within ourselves to love all people freely, to respect the dignity of every human being.

Within the Kingdom of God, we find that when we fall short, which we who are also firmly planted within the secular kingdom will often do, Jesus is there to pick us up. In the Kingdom of God, we have no fear because we know that the poor little Mary’s boy who gave everything for us reigns as King. And within His reign everything turns out all right.

Now this time, I say, “Long live Poor Little Mary’s boy”

And you say, “Long live the King of Kings.”

I say, “Long live Poor Little Mary’s boy”

You say, “Long live the King of Kings.

I say, “Long live Poor Little Mary’s boy”

You say, “Long live the King of Kings.

[i] Adapted from Barbara Kay Lundblad in Huffington Post (12/6/2017), found in Synthesis, A Weekly Resource for Preaching and Worship following the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, November

[ii] Malina, B. J., & Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1998). Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John (p. 249). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press