

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"How the King Fights"  
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Christ the King/Holy Baptism

Everyone fights. There was a time when I didn't believe that everyone does fight with someone at some time in their lives, but everyone fights. Now some of us have seen lots more shouting than others and perhaps even physical abuse and other kinds of abuse. Perhaps we have become the one who hears themselves shouting or sees themselves hurting others. There is a wide continuum of what we might call "fighting." But I really do believe even the most peaceful and civilized among us have engaged in fighting, usually verbally, if not more than that.

And I hope you know that fighting isn't bad in itself. Now I'm not talking about Mixed Martial Arts or professional Boxing or other sports that have physical fighting as a key component to the sport. That's another discussion for another day. I'm talking about the broadest sense of fighting between individuals. It's not bad as it is an attempt to put forward your point of view, to get your point across, to relay your passion and your concern.

But fighting fairly and respectfully is again a difficult course to navigate. Because there are ways to have conflict with one another where we can have different points of view, even argue, without harmful fighting. I'm not sure I've completely worked this out. I just know that differences of opinion, respect and truth are all positions I want to be able to honour.

You and I both know that we do not agree on 100% of all topics of conversation. We will not agree on 100% of all moral and ethical questions that face us either individually or as a group.

But we do have in common a mutual desire to come together to hear God, to experience God's love and also believe that God has a unique, truthful, connection to reality that none of us have perfectly, but all of us need it. At least that's what I believe is happening during this sermon time together. It's not just my opinions, but a reflection of what God says, and is saying through me. Not exactly as David says, but similarly, he noted that the Spirit of the Lord speaks through him, and that ministry continues here and in every pulpit honouring Jesus Christ across the face of the earth this morning.

We do our best to find the common ground of trusting God together and hearing God together. You care about what God has to say to you. You care about Jesus Christ, who is more than the founder of the Christian faith, who is the person who makes the faith alive today. Jesus is the reason we come here, why we built this place, why we keep reading this book we call the Bible. We recognize that we still have much to learn about this person Jesus, a real person, a living person, our connection to God.

Not everyone believes that about Jesus today. Others will choose whatever path they choose. You and I here today are called to follow this One we rightly call Master and Lord. We invite you, I invite you to embrace anew this One Jesus, who is the eternal King, Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Beginning and the End, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer.

As we come closer to this One Jesus, we by definition come closer to each other. A community has formed, and continues to form, as we discover and rediscover our connection to Jesus. He gives a connection to each other that he uniquely provides us.

As we get closer to Jesus, we can care about what he cares about. In the New Testament, Paul in the letter to Ephesians, chapter 6, tells us that we are in a fight, in a spiritual battle, and that we need armour to fight the battle. Armour is typically used in battle by soldiers to make sure they will be protected from serious wounding. Body armour is still used today to protect soldiers and police. But the armour is not what we expect and the enemy is not human. Human beings are not our enemy. "We struggle not against flesh and blood..." but against powers that want us to give up on God and give up on life. Paul urges us to not lose the truth, a sense of what is right and living rightly, willingness to share why you trust God with your life, and what God's book says about living this life. Each of these are pieces of body armour that will guard our hearts and minds and the rest of who we are.

So we are in a fight. We are not each other's enemy. But we can fight with each other. I figure we better look at how Jesus fights as the Royal Leader he is, so we can fight Jesus' way. Yes, Jesus is a fighter. But his kingdom is not like the superpowers of today, or the empires of yesterday. Jesus' way and kingdom surprises us.

Note first of all what Jesus says in his encounter with Pilate in John 18. Remember that Pilate is the government leader in the occupation military establishment. Pilate asks Jesus if he is indeed a king.

Jesus is less interested in first of all answering the question. He is more interested in whether Pilate wants to get to know him or not. Jesus asks Pilate if that is his own question or someone else's. Jesus is more interested in getting to know you and me, and having a relationship with us, than answering all our questions. He knows that it is first of all important to be known and cared about, not just having intellectual curiosity, but really caring about who Jesus really is. We need to know we are in church today because we want to be close to Christ, and not mostly for other reasons, as good as some of those other reasons might be. Sometimes we go to church because we think we should, or because a family member thinks we should, or because we are in the habit of doing so. But the number one reason is having an audience with King Jesus, entering his throne room, hearing his love and encouragement, his words of truth and direction, peace and hope anew. We bring ourselves and our lives to Jesus. We bring our families and our children to Jesus, just as Amy and James have brought Hannah today to Jesus, to offer their lives and her life to the King.

The second thing that happens with Pilate is how he responds. He responds as a political leader, and what he is not, rather with what he is. He tells Jesus that he is not a Jew, not a believer; and yet here he is, talking in private with the Lord, in his headquarters, the governor's palace. There appears to be openness to Jesus, but we are not sure at this point. Pilate again asks what Jesus has done to be accused by his own religious leaders, where they are asking to have Jesus executed.

The third thing that happens with Pilate is that Jesus admits he is a king, that he has a kingdom and a mission. He is about to reveal one of the main ways to identify the kingdom of God. But right now he notes that his kingdom is not a military one, at least not one that has military might that he wants to use. Remember what he said to Peter in the garden of Gethsemane, that he could order ten thousand angels to appear and defend him at any time, (Matthew 26:53) but he is not establishing a military kingdom, or a political one. He establishes with you and I, and anyone who would listen, a spiritual movement, where we have access to God and relationship with God, and a new adventure with God starting in this life and carrying on into the next, if we believe Jesus truly is the Way, the Truth and the Life as John records it in

John 14, representing the events of Maundy Thursday in the Upper Room. Now Jesus is with Pilate early before the crucifixion, on Good Friday.

Fourth, Pilate recognizes Jesus as a King. He knows he is in the presence of one who is changing history. But as a politician, and a military officer, he is about to be confronted with a choice. That choice is offered by Jesus in the simplest of terms, which is offered in such an amazing and peaceful way, in the midst of Jesus knowing his own life is on the line. Jesus lets us know that he did have a royal birth, albeit in cognito, without the fanfare of a royal birth, in spite of the Magi knowing. He was on a mission and is on a mission. That mission is “testifying to the truth.” He is a truth teller. And he urges Pilate and everyone of us to listen to him in regard to the truth.

Here is the main point of how Jesus fights. It is with prayer, as he talks with God the Father through his earthly ministry and as he releases the Holy Spirit to every believer. He challenges Pilate to declare himself on the side of truth, the side of Jesus’ kingdom.

But as many do today, Pilate does not receive that invitation. He rather questions the whole concept of truth, as he has probably been burned by superiors and others. He relativizes the term with the last thing he says personally in this particular private encounter with the Lord, “What is truth?” He becomes the academic who notes we only have human guesses as to what that word “truth” means. So everyone defines reality the way they wish, no one truly know what history is, and all of us get to define our personal truths, rather than receive the truth from God himself, who ironically will soon be tortured to death, in part due to these encounters with Pilate, in part due to Jesus not wavering from his mission. If we lose truth, we lose it all. Our message is gone, there is no reason for a gospel, and Jesus places emphasis on something that we do not believe. Let us not go that route of universalism, where everything is acceptable and there is no way to follow, because all ways are equally true.

As we fight, or disagree, or try to love one another, let us remember Jesus, talk to Jesus, honour Jesus as the King we follow, remembering that his kingdom is the kingdom of heaven, noting that he does not fight with violence or malice, or trying to win. In fact, he loses everything. Yet, as he would say, gains more than the whole world, as he serves us, loves us, and entrusts his ongoing mission to us. Let us honour him this day, and in the

future as we discuss difficult issues and care about what He cares about, caring for each other.

Let us pray.