

Philippians 2:5-11
Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Fred Harrell
February 16, 2025

Experiencing Jesus as Lord

“You have accepted Jesus as your Savior, but what about as your Lord!” The evangelist shouted at a group of us in high school.

That may sound weird to some of you but if you were raised evangelical like me, you heard it a lot. For me, it was all about the personal, “surely there’s a place in my life where I need to submit to the Lordship of Christ!” It felt more like a weapon for a preacher to make me feel guilty than a path of liberation.

Of course, our faith should make us do personal inventory. But “Jesus is Lord” is way bigger, way more provocative, and way more liberating than me working on cussing less on the school playground!

Jesus is Lord equals Jesus is Liberator. When I think about Jesus as Lord, three things come to mind in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Kingdom, Cross, and Restoration.

Kingdom, show us a new arrangement of the world.

The royal language used to describe Jesus' birth, such as being hailed as a king by angels and adored by the Magi, intentionally countered the Roman Empire's propaganda. During the Roman occupation from Augustus to Domitian, proclaiming "Jesus is Lord" was a political statement challenging the imperial claim that "Caesar is Lord." This assertion positioned Jesus as an alternative to Caesar, directly confronting the authority of the Empire.

Jesus came announcing an alternative arrangement of human society, where the poor are blessed, the sick are healed, mercy triumphs over judgment, sinners are forgiven, and love is its foundation. Jesus said, and still says, if we will listen, “My realm is not founded on power and enforced by violence. My realm is founded on love and expressed in forgiveness.”

Because here’s the thing: What we all need is not a Lord with the largest defense budget but a Lord who refuses to play that game. Whose power is not centered in our endless cycle of violence. Who does not mimic the politics of this world but rather comes as a savior who knows that more violence will never save us from our addiction to violence, which is as old as Cain killing Abel and is still destroying us.

These revolutionary ideas were such a threat that the powers that be put him on an insurrectionist's cross. Jesus on a cross is a damning indictment of the world as it has been

arranged around violence and coercive power. “The world will be changed by non-coercive love or not at all!”

Cross, shows us a new use of power.

Let's be clear, Empire put Jesus on the cross, not God. It was a state-sponsored and religiously endorsed lynching.

Jesus is up there with the two thieves. One said, “Save yourself!” “You’ve shown your power, now use it! Time to get out a can of whup-ass! No more losing! Losers are pathetic!” We are the ones obsessed with winners and losers. Who is in and who is out. Insiders and Outsiders. Good people and Bad people. We love binaries. It's so tidy, and makes our anxiety go down, at least momentarily.

Binary thinking is NOT a mark of Jesus' Lordship beloveds.

At the cross, we see that Jesus came and showed us how strong God is by voluntarily losing at our game.

He tried to teach us maddening things, things that destabilize our systems of trying to get over on people. He said that the “first shall be last, and the last shall be first,” that “if you want to find your life, then lose it,” and that “the greatest among you must become servants.” He also said, “If someone slaps you, offer them the other cheek as well.”

All of this losing can happen and we will still be OK.

Because the source of our worth, the source of our dignity, lies not in the win/lose games we play, but in Genesis 1:26 and our having been created in the very image of God.

I may feed my desire to be right, to get over on others, to make people who have harmed me pay for their actions. But it's an empty high, and then we crash.

Theologian and writer, Ariana Grande says it best in her song, “POV”, where she says “I'd love to see me from your point of view”. It starts there. I think denying the image of God in others begins when you lose sight of it within yourself. When you see yourself the way God sees you, when you see yourself from God's point of view, as the beloved child of God, you have a chance to see others that way as well.

Jesus knew his belovedness. That's why, while he's gasping for his breath on the cross, says “Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing,” which is a way of saying they don't know the systems that are entangling their souls to put a person like Jesus up on a cross. Jesus, seeing himself from the point of view of his Creator, then uses his power to love, and liberate us from our endless cycles of violence.

That's how this Lord uses power.

Restoration shows us new life for everyone.

There's a place in the gospels where a woman has an ongoing hemorrhage of some type, making her unclean and an outcast. Jesus has just been summoned by a powerful man, Jairus, to heal his daughter.

Ever get close to power and wealth and feel its allure, its siren song? It is intoxicating. Jesus, as a full-on member of the human race, would have felt it when the powerful Jairus asked him to heal his daughter.

But the woman is there. Bleeding. Invisible to most around her. And she reaches out to touch his robe. Jesus, it says, feels the power leave his body. Turns around and sees the woman. And, as the Mark account tells us, "listens to her whole truth." Something nobody had done for 12 years.

Jesus will stop and prioritize you too.

Another story comes to mind. The religious authorities who were corrupt and in bed with Rome bring Jesus a woman "caught" in adultery. Looks like they were in bed in other ways too. This woman, a victim of patriarchy, and who is now being slut shamed in front of Jesus, must wonder what will happen now. After all, the "Bible is clear" crowd has their clobber verses ready.

Jesus de-escalates by slowing down (a lesson to us all). "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Hear the challenge in that, but also the empathy. Jesus knows that all humans are a mess, we are in this together, and our liberation will happen together as well.

In Jesus's beloved community, all are treated as family.

The word "Kingdom" is helpful in that it points to the political nature of what Jesus was about. But its usefulness may stop there. It brings up images of hierarchy, privilege, and a world in which the wealthy and powerful rule over the weak, take advantage of that weakness, crush it under the boot, and lash it with the whip. It conjures up a cruel, irrational tyrant who takes vengeance against his enemies.

Inspired by *mujerista* theology, which emerges from the experiences of Latin women, many young "post-evangelicals" have adopted the term "kin-dom," where love fosters kinship, inviting all to a continually expanding table. Liberation is not a distant hope for the afterlife but a reality we can build now. "Kin-dom" signifies that we are united as siblings, not by blood, but through our shared identity as beloved children of God.

I think both terms are needed. They beg different but important questions.

Kingdom? How can you counter systems of oppression with the power you have been given? In other words, how do you spend your money?

Kin-dom? How are you engaged in widening the table to welcome all into new life in Jesus? In other words, how do you spend your time?

The checkbook and the calendar will likely reveal your Lord.

Today, Jesus invites us into the liberation of his Lordship. As my pastor friend, Brian Zahnd likes to say:

Once we learn to embody that kind of ethos we no longer have to grasp for Caesar's scepter. It's enough for us to take the hand of our neighbor. For among Jesus' most radical ideas is this one: To love your neighbor as yourself is a viable political policy.

Amen.