

*Kingdom Allegiance: Faithfulness to Jesus in Our Political Age*

In July 1940, World War II was firmly underway, and the German attack against Britain was focused on the skies. The German air guard has fought to decimate the Royal Air Force over the English Channel. It was in September of 1940 that the Germans began to bomb cities all throughout Britain with the specific target of London. By the end of that month, 7,000 people had been killed, 9,000 more had been injured. This attack became known as the Blitz. And it would last until May 1941.

It was in that summer of 1940 when an intellectual from Britain named C.S. Lewis conceived and began writing this classic work of Christian satire, which he titled the *Screwtape Letters*. Now, Lewis' role within World War II in England was often one in which the city around him, the state power, would call him and say, can you preach through the airways? Can you write letters that would get to people throughout the newspapers? And so this classic book, *The Screwtape Letters*, began as a series of newspaper columns, which were published in what became known as the Guardian. Then, they were distributed throughout to the people. Lewis' aim was basically a little bit like ours as in how does the church stay faithful in their particular moment?

If you're not familiar with *The Screwtape Letters*, I encourage you to read it. I think every Christian should read it at some point. It's a masterful work of satire that flips the traditional script. It consists of fictional letters written by an elderly retired devil named Uncle Screwtape, who is writing to a young devil named Wormwood.

In this relationship, the uncle was writing to Wormwood to help him understand how to lure this newly converted Christian away from the cause of Christ to the "dark side." It's a look at temptation but from the inside. Lewis wanted to offer a perspective within the psychology of temptation, but to do so from a different angle. So it's within the context of war-torn Britain that the letters carry a certain edge to them. I want to read you this excerpt from letter number seven. Remember, everything is backward. So when they mention the enemy, it's not the devil; it's God because it's devils writing to one another.

**I had not forgotten my promise to consider whether we should make the patient an extreme patriot or an extreme pacifist. All extremes, except extreme devotion to the Enemy, are to be encouraged...Let him begin by treating the Patriotism or the Pacifism as a part of his religion. Then let him, under the influence of partisan spirit, come to regard it as the most important part. Then quietly and gradually nurse him on to the stage at which the religion becomes merely part of the 'cause'... Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly**

**end he is pursuing. Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape - Lewis, Screwtape Letters**

Our age is marked by extremes. More specifically, the extreme ideological purity in which our system resists nuance and demands full allegiance to a binary system that cannot hold the necessary nuance of complex issues. It's this spectrum of our polarized politics that demands that we get pushed to the edges rather than, as the church is called, to be something different and unique. We are called to transcend those things, but yet we live in an era of extremities, an era of ideological purity.

So how, then, do we remain faithful to Jesus in this time? How do we walk the way of Jesus in an era that demands ideological purity? Well, Jesus said strikingly little about faith in politics. There's humility in us when we come to the scriptures, which means we have to extrapolate what we think and map into our modern context what Jesus may do in our particular time. One of the classic texts you go to is the one that we're looking at this morning—John 18. This is at the end of Jesus' life. It's in this moment that we see him coming face-to-face with the powers that be. He has this standoff with Pilate, who was the Roman guard at the time.

**Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die. John 18:28-32**

Rome had given some modicum of authority to the religious leaders, but one of the things that was off the table for religious leaders was capital punishment. They could not actually sentence Jesus to death. So Caiaphas and the high religious leaders were so angry and viewed Jesus as such a threat that they went to the Roman governors. They're not just interested in locking Jesus up. They want him executed. They want blood, and the religious leaders are in such a frenzy that they lean on state power.

And so they take him to Pilate, and Pilate wants to know what charges they are bringing against Jesus. Certainly, Pilate would have heard of Jesus at this time. He would have been very aware of what was going on. So you get a sense that Pilate is trying to skirt the situation. He's in

Jerusalem at Passover, which would have meant the place was just right for revolution with the fervor in the crowd at a fever pitch.

Pilate asked, what are the charges you bring against him? And I love that the religious leaders don't even answer. They're just like, "Well, we wouldn't be here if he wasn't a criminal." So Pilate then pushes it back and says, "Hey, you judge him. You take care of it by your own law." The response is that they want him executed, and they can't do that. So, they outsource it to Pilate.

*"Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'" (v. 33).* Now, this whole scene had been unfolding in a pretty dramatic way. You shift from the overnight illegal trial with lots of different people involved, and all of a sudden, John, the author, narrows the focus of the whole scene right on these two—Pilate and Jesus. The drama heightens in this moment, and Pilate asks this question, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

This is a loaded question. We get it a little bit, but it doesn't strike our ears as strongly as it would have in that moment for two reasons. First, we don't live with kings and queens anymore, so we're not used to the massing of authority within a king in which they have the right to all the decision-making power. We don't quite get the concept of king.

The second reason it doesn't hit us is we can sentimentalize this title. I don't think there's anything wrong with calling Jesus the king of your heart. I understand the ethos there to say the king is the thing that is the seat of desires and affection, and the decision that I am making for me as a human is Jesus. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. But when we sentimentalize it, we lose the political edge that this title had.

The king of the Jews was a political office, a political title, so Pilate, sitting as the Roman governor, is saying, "Are you a rival king? Are you the king of the Jews?" It's a loaded question. It would be like someone touring around the country and saying, "I am the president of the United States." And as they were gaining a following, you would perk our ears up. We'd be like, wait a minute, but they weren't elected. Who are they? It would strike our ears a little bit like that. Are you the King of the Jews?

**"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" vv. 34-35**

Here's the brilliance of Jesus' question. When he asks if this was Pilate's own idea, he's forcing Pilate's hand because if it was his own idea, then it would have been the question I just posed. "Are you a rival threat or a political threat," but Jesus says, "or did others talk to you about me?" Meaning did the religious leaders bring up the question? Because if the religious leaders brought the question, then the King of the Jews is the messianic title. It's the religious meaning.

He's looking at Pilate, forcing his hand. "Do you think I'm a political threat or just a religious messianic threat?" And the answer, of course, is different for each of those questions. If it was the former, a political threat, the answer from Jesus would have been no. If it was the messianic King of the Jews that was prophesied throughout the Old

Testament, then Jesus' answer would have been yes. He puts Pilate on tilt. Of course, Pilate skirts the question.

**"Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place'" (v. 36).**

This line, "My kingdom is not of this world," is important. You can also translate it as my kingdom is not from this world. The Greek preposition there can mean "of or from" it has the same meaning as "out of." Meaning "My kingdom is not out of this world." It's not created from the same ethos. It's not created from the same resources. It's something different.

The word for world, here, is the word Kosmos. There's another word for earth, which, when we read this, we often think of it in platonic terms, meaning we think of it as when Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world." "We think that it's a heavenly thing somewhere out over there, some different dimension or reality. But that's not what's intended. The word cosmos carries what I was talking about earlier: the sense of the ethos of the day. It is not created out of the same thing as when humans create a kingdom.

Jesus details it clearly. He says that if it were of this cosmos, this world, his servants would do what their servants would do. They'd take up arms to prevent his arrest from the Jewish leaders. "But now my kingdom is from another place." He's saying it's a totally different game. If it was of this world, he'd be at war. Certainly, Jesus had the availability to call down the armies from heaven to go to war with him.

Often, the disciples wanted that. There was a scene where the disciples were walking with Jesus, and the people rejected them. James and John asked Jesus if he wanted them to call fire down on the people. Their imagination had been saturated by the kingdoms of this world, so their minds, the resources that they understood how kingdoms operated, were not the way Jesus' kingdom operated. You'll see later, in Jesus' arrest, just a few hours earlier, Peter pulls the sword out.

**Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" John 18:10-11**

It's a kingdom of a whole different essence. It is not of this world. Pilate is feeling the tension.

**"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." v. 37**

This is a beautiful exchange in which Pilate thinks he's got him. "You are a king. You just said your kingdom is not of this world." Jesus then describes his kingdom. Here's the differentiating factor between Jesus' kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Jesus is a philosopher king. He doesn't come to take up arms and fight physically against other

kingdoms. Rather, he deals with truth. His kingdom comes through ideas about this kingdom of God. That's the present. That's here. This backward teaching, which he says to reorient everything you understand about the way the world works. There's a new way.

Jesus doesn't say. "The reason I was born and came into this world is to overthrow the kingdoms of this world through violence and force and to bring about the purposes of justice." No, the reason he was born and came into this world is to testify to the truth. "*What is truth?*" retorted Pilate" (v. 38a). Some things are not new. Centuries before French Post-modernism, Pilate asked, "What is truth?"

**With this, he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews?'" They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising. vv. 38b-40**

Now, we don't know much about Barabbas, but we do know that each of the gospels mentions him in this scene where apparently there was some custom in which Pilate could release, at the Passover feast, one of the prisoners. So, Pilate, going through this charade with Jesus, begins to think that maybe they would let Jesus go because he does not seem to have a charge. So Pilate goes out and places Jesus next to Barabbas.

The text in John says Barabbas had taken part in an uprising. Matthew, Mark, and Luke also say this. In Matthew 27, they call Barabbas a notorious prisoner. Mark 15 speaks of Barabbas saying he was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. In Luke 23 he had been thrown in prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder. So, when you put all this together, what we know about Barabbas is that he was part of the resistance movement. He would have, in some ways, been a hero to those who were eager for revolution because he was sticking it to Rome. He was doing what he could, putting his life on the line to flip the system around.

The crowds were faced with this choice. Do they want the kingdom of God or the kingdom of this world? What's interesting about Barabbas is his name literally means "as son of the father," which on the other side of Pilate was Jesus, who is the Son of Father, God. The choice before the crowd is which son would you like? Would you like Barabbas, the kingdom marked by violence and worldly power, or do you want the kingdom of Jesus marked by peace, a different king who is committed to truth and whose kingdom is built of reconciliation and the healing of the world? Which one would you like?

The crowd shouts out, "We want Barabbas. Give us Barabbas." It's a tale as old as time. The choice between the two ways goes all through history, into World War II, in the era of C.S. Lewis, and even to us. Which kingdom do we want? What would it look like for us to maintain our faithfulness to the kingdom of God in a political age of extremes in which we are being pushed to the edges?

I want to hone in on the two aspects of the kingdom of God that Jesus describes in this text. The first one comes from verse 36. Let's review that one again. "*Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place'"* (v. 36).

When we read this, we tend to diminish it because we don't think it's as radical in nature. We think that our time must be more polarized and tense than it was in Jesus' times. But that would be a myth. It was just as tense, if not more polarized, in the first century as it is in our time. The tension and polarization took place within the religious sects of that day. There were different groups of religious people or leaders that Jesus didn't fit into.

On one end, you had the Pharisees. Now, the Pharisees would be the closest equivalent to modern conservatives. It doesn't map perfectly, but it'd be the closest. They're more rural and deeply devoted to God and the scripture. However, although they held such an esteem for the scriptures, they had lost the plot. They had lost their heart posture for God and, most specifically, God's heart for compassion and mercy.

On the other side of the spectrum, it doesn't map perfectly, but it's worth noting that you had this group called the Sadducees, and they would have been the closest to what we would call progressives in our times. They were more urban, upper class, and elites tended to be more educated. However, they had "moved on from the scriptures." They didn't believe most of the Bible to be scripture. Mainly nothing after the Torah, meaning they rejected most of Jewish doctrine. They didn't believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe in life after death or anything in the supernatural realm. They were the ones who were down in power in Jerusalem. They were a small minority, but they had achieved that power and wealth.

So you have these two factions, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. What's interesting and may map onto our time as well is that they rallied together, though, in this moment because Jesus doesn't fit into either category, and he threatened both. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." So they have united to take out their hatred and vitriol towards Jesus.

There's a theologian, a scholar of the early church, named Larry Hurtado, who wrote a fascinating book with maybe one of the best titles ever, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*. It's worth a read. It's a little academic and can be tedious.

Hurtado's thesis is that what caused the early church to explode in growth in that first century moment post-Jesus was not its relevance or adaptability to the moment, but rather its distinctiveness that he claims was both attractive and offensive to the modern world. He lists five categories of the distinctive elements that constituted the life of the church, and Tim Keller, riffing on Hurtado's book, called this the category of defying social vision. So, I want to walk through all five of them.

### **The Early Church was Multi-racial and Multi-ethnic.**

The Christian identity of the early church was shocking to the pagan world because, up until that point in history, you were born into your religion, which meant that each race, country, and location had its own

religion, and no one had the option of choosing their religion. So naturally, downstream from that, all religions were culturally homogenous, meaning your race determined your faith.

Then the Christian movement came along, and this concept of the image of God in which from Genesis 1, the scriptures teach that every human being has the image of God placed on them, which means the dignity of all humans, regardless of nationality, regardless of race and ethnicity, all of that is set aside because we are all created in the image of God. This moved the faith to a more fundamental reality than culture and race and translated into what it means to be human. It transcended all cultural boundaries. It was a stunning shift in the history of the world and of religions and confounded the first century.

### **Committed to Caring for the Poor and the Marginalized.**

In the first century, it was not normal to care for the poor and marginalized. You'd take care of your own family or tribe, but you would never take care of the "other" because they're a rival religion. They're rivals. They're an enemy. They're on the outside looking in. The early church took a fundamentally different posture. They viewed every person through the lens of the image of God. Therefore, it was their obligation and responsibility to not just care for their own, but to care for all.

As a pagan emperor, Julian once remarked on the church's Christian practice of caring for the poor: "They're caring not only for their poor but for ours as well." It was confounding at the time. It was both attractive and offensive. Who are you to take care of ours? Yet there was something to it, particularly with the poor and the marginalized, who found home, who found family, and who found belonging within this community.

### **Committed to Not Retaliating and Marked by a Commitment to Forgiveness.**

One of the distinctive characteristics of the early church was they were committed to a practice of non-violence. In which if you attacked or killed them, they refused to organize around retaliation and seek revenge. The early church is littered with examples of the martyrs. The easiest, of course, is Jesus at the spearhead of the whole thing. Then, in the Book of Acts, you see Stephen, who was killed for his faith.

The early Christians confounded the world around them. They took Christ's teaching on forgiveness and the turning of the other cheek very seriously. In turn, they created a community of peacemaking, reconciliation, and bridge-building.

### **They Were Strongly and Practically Against Abortion and Infanticide.**

From the beginning of the first century, the pagan world had this practice called exposure, in which if the Romans didn't want a baby, they would leave them out in the wilderness alone to die. The fate of that baby was one of two options. Either it died or was scooped up, raised, and sold into slavery. The early church, with this image of the perspective of the Imago Dei, was against the practice of abortion or infanticide.

So they would go around and take up these babies, bring them in, give them a home, give them a family, and raise them up as loved image bearers of Christ. It was a beautiful practice.

They viewed no gradation of human value and therefore backed up that position by taking in and caring for these children. It was a shocking ethic in a trivialized and socially stratified culture in which they gave dignity to all.

### **Revolutionizing Sex Ethic in the Roman World.**

Sex was viewed primarily as an appetite to be filled. Its purpose was to serve the social order, and yet it was wildly played out in many inequitable ways. Married women were not allowed to have sex with anyone but their husbands, but men in the Roman world, including married men, could have sex with any male or female they wanted, as long as it was with someone of less honor and class.

The Christian teachings of Jesus were a radical departure from this view of sex. Christianity offered a teaching that detached sex and marriage from the social order and connected it to the cosmic order. Meaning it was connected metaphorically to the vision of God's saving love and redemption. God gave himself to us by going to the cross, and the response is that we give ourselves wholly and exclusively to God and no other. This then mapped onto the sex ethic in which we give ourselves, two different beings, God and humanity, which is the source of why we view sex through the lens of one man and one woman in a covenantal relationship. It mirrors the relationship in which God has with humanity.

It's this Christian teaching that brings about a different ethic that was radical in the first century, that was wildly progressive in the first century. It was not for self-gratification but for giving one's whole self and a consensual marriage covenant that created a deep unity across the differences between male and female alone. It was this high and attractive vision that wildly flattened the power dynamics within the Roman culture, and Christianity became immensely attractive to women who saw it as an equalizing, empowering religion.

We often get this wrong, but the church's sex ethic is a much higher view of sex. It is thought of as a diminished one, but we hold that sex is much more than just play for adults. It's something in which our souls are mingling with one another with the very presence of God. Something to be protected and held.

Hurtado's thesis through all of these five distinctives was that the rise in prominence of the early church was not rooted in relevance or relatability but in its distinction. You quickly realize that when you view through these distinctions that we don't fit into any category. Tim Keller reflected on Hurtado's book.

The first two distinctives on ethnic diversity and caring for the poor sound "liberal," and the last two views on abortion and sexual ethics sound "conservative." The third element, being non-retaliatory, sounds like no particular party today and is commonly rejected in today's culture of outrage. Churches today are under enormous pressure to



jettison the first two or the last two but not to keep them all. Yet to give up any of them would make Christianity the handmaid of a particular political program and undermine the missionary encounter. Tim Keller

See, when churches and or Christians link themselves to a party or an agenda, they inevitably diminish their witness. They're pursuing relatability or relevance or whatever it is to reach the culture, but throughout history, it's our distinctiveness held with the graciousness of love that we have been able to carry on the mission of the church. If I were to summarize all of the last five to ten minutes, it would be: Faithfulness to Jesus will require unfaithfulness to your preferred political party. We simply do not fit.

It doesn't mean you shouldn't register to vote. It doesn't mean you shouldn't even maybe come to certain convictions in which you do vote in this party or that, but this should foster in us a humility that recognizes we don't fit in any category and, therefore, we should not put our hope in the categories that are presented, but rather we're stuck in a system in which we are resident aliens. We're here; we're present, but we're something different. We're something that doesn't seem to fit the categories. As Keller said, a category defines social vision.

It was this kind of move that made the early church come to prominence. One of the great tragedies in the lives of partisan politics is that it demands you restrict yourself to the social issues you care about. Partisan politics will demand that you only go in one camp or the other. However, as Christians, we must maintain and hold to those five distinctives as we are something altogether different. We cannot be caught in the trappings of this false dichotomy of right and left, and in so doing, buy the myth that we have to pick a side to find our political identity. Rather, as followers of our Rabbi Jesus, we don't fit in, and therefore, we are about a kingdom that's altogether different.

Jesus provides an answer as to what that kingdom looks like. *"Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me'"* (v. 37). So, our task is to testify to the truth.

Let's give an answer to Pilot's questions of what truth is. Certainly, I cannot answer this question in a few minutes, but I can take a stab at it. The best definition I know of truth is: Truth is that which corresponds with reality. You either have gas in your car right now, or you don't. If you believe you do, your belief lines up with the truth if there's gas in your car. I'm either a scratch golfer or I'm not. For the record, I'm not. So the truth is I'm not. That's what matches reality.

We cannot forget that Jesus came not with weapons of physical defense but weapons of ideas and philosophies. This is why he came as a savior, yes, but also as a teacher. That was his vocation as a rabbi. The struggle that many of us have is that we've come to buy the myth that belief in Jesus is an act of faith, which means we set rationality aside. That's not the truth. That's a false dichotomy.

The primary cultural outlook today is that there is no objective truth or reality, and the cultural move of subjective truth taking that key spot is a shift in which we've moved from the primary locus of what it means

to be truth from God—scripture and the church—to an enlightenment triad, which is science, research, and the university.

I am not anti-intellectual. I am barely surviving my seventh year of a PhD program, but I very much believe in it. What historically has happened is that the shift has moved in what Willard would call the disappearance of moral knowledge. It is crowded out, not from rational achievement but from a drift stating that Jesus in the New Testament does not offer a body of knowledge to the world. That's a drift. That's not an achievement. The Enlightenment would claim it's an achievement that we've moved beyond that. But the reality is that the teachings of the New Testament have everything to offer our world regarding the very data points of reality.

It's better to give than to receive. It's interesting how most of us intuitively know that and feel that. We put that in some category as opinion, but it seems pretty universally accepted as true. Think of the movement in our culture now that we want this love ethic. It's beautiful. They're bumping into the truth of Jesus, who would say, love your enemies, but they don't know what to do with it because they don't have a backing, a worldview saturated in the teachings of Jesus to place it anywhere. Yet our culture intuitively knows it. That's beautiful.

We have the story in which we can come along and testify to the truth and say, let me tell you about what love looks like. It looks like Jesus on a cross. Remember, if you've been reading through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, you've heard it said, love your neighbor. Everyone does that. But Jesus pushes it further. Love your enemy. So we live in a world in which comedian Lily Tomlin would say, "What is reality anyway? Nothing but a collective hunch." But we as the church have the opportunity to testify to the truth, testify to that which matches up with reality.

Now, I don't love that I have to make this caveat, but it's important. When we testify or bear witness to the truth, let me guard us to say that you don't need to fight for the truth. The truth is a fact. It will stand on its own. It doesn't matter how we feel about it; it doesn't matter how others feel about it. It simply is. So, church, we don't have to get into the culture war game of fighting for the truth. The truth will stand on its own. We bear witness to the truth. With a posture of love, graciousness, and humility, we hold the ground to those distinctives. We ask what would happen if there was a different way to live. And we exemplify that to the world around us. So, to bear witness to the truth is different from fighting for it. It simply means our task is to commit to it.

### **Listen and Obey the Truth**

The first thing we do in testifying to the truth is we must first listen and obey the truth. This is why Jesus is a rabbi, a teacher. We take in the teachings of Jesus into our bodies, our budgets, our relationships, and all that we are, every aspect of our life, and we let Jesus be the dominant voice to help us understand the reality around us. This is why he must be the most dominant voice in your life. Everyone is trying to make sense of reality, every different voice or angle is trying to project an image of what it means to be and live in this world. As Christians, we

say that Jesus has something to say to all of that. All the big questions of life, Jesus has something to offer.

So, we must listen and obey the truth. It's how we change the mental maps of reality. It's as simple as when you get in your car after our time together and want to head to lunch over in San Mateo. If you punch in that restaurant and it takes you to Hayward, you'll quickly recognize that your mental map of reality was off. You could follow that map with diligence and commitment, and passion, but if it's pointed to Hayward, you're not getting to lunch in San Mateo. It doesn't matter how devout we hold it; if it isn't built out of the teachings of Jesus, it will take you in a different direction. Truth is that which corresponds with reality.

### **Bear Witness to Truth in Word and Deed**

The second is that, as the church, we must bear witness to the truth in word and deed in a non-anxious, non-reactive presence. The church needs to hold this. In a world of hostility, we can inject love into the world. We can do this by stop getting caught up in the culture war. Be a patient, non-reactive presence, and bear witness to the truth. Not getting caught up in the eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth game, but in a non-anxious, non-reactive presence, bear witness to the truth in word and deed. Speak graciously to others, not dehumanizing, not calling names, but point to the truth.

The word for testify to truth is the same word where we get the word martyr. When that conflicts with reality, we may take shame. We may take false accusation. We may take lies. We may miss a promotion. We may not be able to advance in our careers. We may be ridiculed, but our task is to absorb that hate and not respond in kind. It's how we inject love into the world. If we respond with hatred, we simply continue the myth of redemptive violence, allowing that to rule the world.

Jesus absorbed the hate on the cross. "Father, forgive them, for I know not what they do." What if our task in this age is to absorb the pain, the hurt, and the vitriol of the world and just let it dissipate in our bodies? It's a hard teaching, but it's all throughout the New Testament. Paul in Philippians, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death," (Philippians 3:10). What if that's what it looked like?

### **Our Aim is Love**

Lastly, we're to remember that our aim is love. This is so simple. It's Christianity 101.

**"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment" Matthew 22:36-38**

We must never miss that in bearing witness to the truth.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

Our aim is always a self-giving cruciform love. It is a genuine regard and goodwill towards the other in which we hold them up with relational affection and warmth. We commit to a love that's ultimately defined by Jesus on the cross. It's not based on desire, feeling, affection, or tolerance, but rather, a genuine goodwill towards the other.

This is how we bear witness to the truth because when we do that work of love, we bear witness to the God who is love. That is our task to listen and obey the truth, bear witness to the truth in word and deed, and never forget that our aim is love. Come what may this November, regardless of who wins, our task doesn't change. It's one of the reasons we preach this so far in advance, as it gives us the opportunity as the election approaches to embody this in the world when things escalate.

I can't help but think of that scene back in John 18 in which Jesus is there with Pilate and Barabbas before the crowd. I just wonder if we're standing at a similar moment in which the culture is saying, "Who do you want? The Son of God or this Barabbas son of the father." Who do you want? Where does your allegiance lie? Where does your faith lie? Will we, like that crowd, say, "We want Barabbas," or will we make the opposite choice, "We want Jesus."

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