

This has been an interesting week in our household

My two boys are enrolled in One Wild Life Learning Community for school

They began this school group last year and continue this year

This week their two teachers have been home recovering from covid

All of the kids have remained healthy, and I've had an up-close opportunity to observe their learning this week

One Wild Life promotes student-led

And place-based modes of learning

One Wild Life uplifts and respects the kids' ideas

One Wild Life focuses on discovering and cultivating one's passion

This week I've had seven kids age 9 – 14 continuing their learning in my basement

They connect with their teachers on zoom a few times per day

But mostly, amazingly, they are the drivers of their learning

I've served as the adult upstairs if I'm needed,

But I'm not

Except as a privileged witness to this incredible community

Little gems drift up from the basement throughout my day

Celebrations like "We're so smart!"

Support like "Oh, here, I can help with that!"

And words of encouragement like "Don't worry, you got this!"

Warm my heart

I'm stunned by the silence of these kids working diligently on the next step along their learning path

As I continue my own learning in my Masters of Divinity program upstairs

I'm in awe of the parallel between their self-driven learning and mine

They are young

They are so very capable

They can do hard things

They are empowered to learn... and grow... and thrive...

Outside of the traditional systems and structures of authority \ \

It's within this heartwarming week that I reflect on today's Gospel encounter between Jesus and Pilate

This encounter is all about

Authority \ \ Identity \ \ and Power \ \

Brene Brown deeply explores dynamics of power in Dare to Lead

She distinguishes between

Power over – which is quite a traditional hierarchical top-down power dynamic

And Power with – which is collective power, power that is empathy-driven and shared

Power-with is collaborative

Power-with leadership looks like service to others

One Wild Life Learning Community is an in-my-face example of power-with this week

This empowerment didn't occur just on Monday as the kids gathered independently

This empowerment has been cultivated throughout their time together,
 with the teachers creating space and releasing control to the kids
 growing their confidence in their ability to drive their own learning \ \

As I engage the Gospel and consider Jesus Christ the King

I observe that God is a power-with God

God refuses to participate in power-over dynamics

God denies that power is finite, and promotes power shared with all

God will not use fear as a tool to exercise power-over others

God refuses violence to achieve power

Let's explore the context of this Gospel reading and identify how power is used

This encounter occurs in the time just preceding the Jewish Passover

The Jewish leaders, specifically the high priestly authorities Annas and
 Caiaphas,

have Jesus arrested and questioned about his teaching – exerting power over
 Jesus

Jesus responds that he's done everything in public,

And questions the intent behind this arrest and interrogation – an attempt to
 balance power between them

The nearby police strike him in the face – reinforcing the power-over dynamic
 between the high priest and Jesus

Jesus is then taken from the high priests to Pilate, the Roman governor of
 Judea

Pilate's there, in Jerusalem, to keep Roman order during the time of Jewish
 Passover

Pilate is not Jewish, but a gentile

This collaboration between the Jewish authorities and the Roman governor builds power over Jesus

This next interaction is fascinating

There has been much cultural tension between the Jewish authorities and the gentile Roman rulers as they vie for power over one another

Pilate initially responds that the Jewish authorities should take care of their own business

and judge Jesus according to Jewish law, however,

Roman rulers didn't allow Jewish authorities to carry out death penalties

And so the Jewish authorities submit to Roman rule by requesting Pilate's support

This seems to further Roman leadership's power-over Jewish leadership as they acknowledge Pilate's authority

Through Pilate's dealing with Jesus, the Jews recognize the Roman emperor as their king

Can you feel the tension within this power struggle?

This brings us to the scene we hear about today where Pilate questions Jesus

The hierarchy of power-over kingship is interwoven throughout this entire story,

From the arrest of Jesus by the Jewish authorities

Through the questioning by the high priest

To turning Jesus over to the governor, Pilate

And now Pilate's questioning of Jesus

The Roman rulers didn't necessarily think of Jesus as a threat as he compassionately went around healing and preaching throughout the region.

But now the leaders within Jesus own religious group are alarmed

They find his behavior – and perhaps his power – out of the ordinary

This alarms the Roman empire because they're afraid of the Jewish God

Jesus was perceived as a threat by the empire because

his ministry served as a sign of **God's inbreaking kingdom**

God's action within the world had a reputation,

and God's kingdom didn't side with power-over empire dynamics

God's power is with the marginalized and strangers of the land who are oppressed by the system

Remember what happened with Pharoah and Moses in Egypt?

So King Herod and Governor Pilate worried about the thinness of their thread of power-over the people

They worried about the end of their ability to oppress and exploit people within their kingdom

They feared a time when the nobodies could rise up in power against them

This is the context of Pilate's question: "Are you the King of the Jews?"

And Jesus the Christ's response:

"If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews." (Jn 18:36)

Jesus' kingdom is not of this world

Jesus followers don't, and will not, fight

What kind of a king is this?

Jesus embodies the power of God that refuses power-over others
 even others like Pilate, Herod and the high priests

Jesus the Christ is the kind of king that ushers in a different power dynamic

A power dynamic that is out of this world

A power that is with and for abundant life for all

“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” (Jn 18:37)

Jesus indicates that the incarnation is about to culminate within this time and space

The next question that Pilate asks is the question that remains for us:

“What is truth?” (Jn 18:38)

The truth is:

The power of God’s presence within humankind is about to be revealed through Jesus the Christ

This is a collaborative power that flows within and through all of God’s creation

The truth is

Within creation God designed humankind to not be alone

The truth is

God breathes power into creation through the Holy Spirit to co-create with God

The truth is

We worship God who chose to be enfleshed in human skin

As Jesus is headed toward crucifixion

The truth is

that the God we worship takes all of this authoritarian power

From the Jewish authorities

From the Roman empire

Into God's self

God transforms and re-creates this power-over

Through the resurrection

Into power-with

The truth is

that Jesus the Christ, resurrected and made new

breathes into us, God's followers,

This collaborative power of the Holy Spirit \ \

And sometimes the truth is too much to grasp

Sometimes the truth overwhelms

Sometimes the truth is diminished by the reality that we continue to live within a power-over society

Sometimes we forget the power we have

And I think back to the precious words that have drifted up from my basement this week

From these kids living One Wild Life

"Oh, here, I can help with that!"

"We're so smart!"

“Don’t worry, you got this!”

And I am encouraged...

With Jesus as our teacher we are empowered

We are so very capable

We can do hard things

The Holy Spirit is with us as we learn... and grow... and thrive...

As we participate in, work toward, and even **demand** power-with systems

This is our inheritance,

This is our call

Amen.