

The King & I

There once was a wise and righteous king who ruled his people with justice and integrity. The people loved their king so much that they emulated his integrity and honesty. In this wise king's land everyone obeyed the commandment not to steal. However, one day valuable things began to disappear in the palace and homes throughout the kingdom's capital city. At first the people thought they had misplaced the valuable objects. However, it soon became clear that a thief was at work in the kingdom. The king became distraught. He called his people together.

The king addressed his people: "I know a thief is at work in our land. This must stop! If the guilty party returns the stolen property, confesses guilt, begs for forgiveness and endures ten lashes from a whip, all will be forgiven and forgotten." Silence followed.

The next day the king assembled the people again. He addressed his people: "A thief is among us. If you return the goods, repent, ask for forgiveness and endure twenty lashes from a whip all will be forgiven." The silence that followed was deafening. Each day, for three more days, the king assembled his people, challenged the thief to return the goods, repent, ask forgiveness and endure first thirty, then forty and finally fifty lashes. Silence followed each of the three challenges.

Sometime after the fifth assembly, evidence was discovered which proved the identity of the thief beyond a shadow of a doubt. The evidence pointed to the king's own mother. The items of stolen property were recovered from her quarters and returned to their rightful owners. The thief had to pay the consequences. The king had to order his own mother whipped. He had issued an edict and it had to be carried out. If he failed to punish his mother he could no longer be called a just and righteous king who lived by and administered his rule of law.

The next day the king assembled his people. He had his mother tied to the whipping post. Her back was laid bare in order to receive the lashes. The king knew his torturer would hesitate and may even refuse to inflict the punishment. So the king stood right beside his torturer. "Administer the punishment," the king cried out. The torturer swung the whip back in preparation for the first strike. Just as he readied himself for the first blow, the king cried out: "stop!" He took off his robes, went to his mother hugged her, and thereby exposed his back to the torturer. "Administer the punishment," the king shouted. The king took his mother's punishment.

Beautiful story isn't it? But it is not a story. At Easter we witness this story take on flesh. On the first Easter evening, Jesus came to his disciples. They were assembled in a locked room. They were afraid of the Jewish authorities, and convinced the authorities would do to them what they had done to Jesus. They had denied and turned their back on Jesus. They promised to fight for him; however, when push came to shove, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times and the others ran away. Not only had they disowned and deserted Jesus, they refused to believe in the resurrection when Mary confronted them with the good news. They rightly deserved punishment, just like the king's mother.

However, Jesus appeared to them, not to punish them but to save them. Jesus showed them the holes in his hands and feet the nails had left and the gash in his side. The prophet Isaiah promised the disciples that the Messiah, God's suffering servant, would be pierced for their transgressions and wounded for their sins. He would be a sin offering for many. (*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*). When Jesus appeared to his disciples he said, "Peace be with you." With these words Jesus forgave the disciples that night. Like the king embraced his mother, Jesus embraced each of his disciples and proved to them that he had taken their punishment for them. Once again he pronounced peace on his disciples and empowered them and the church their witness

would produce, to speak words of forgiveness in Jesus name. Whenever Jesus is proclaimed as Christ, Messiah, and Son of God, incarnate in human form, who suffered and died for our sins and was resurrected on the third day; all those who earnestly repent and truly believe this message are embraced by Jesus and granted the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus promised them even more. Jesus promised to prepare a place in heaven for all he redeems: *"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14:3) Jesus promised that in their last hour, when they breathed their last, he would be there one more time. Like the king embraced his mother, Jesus promised to embrace his disciples once more and take them home to be with him.

Do you feel guilty? Are you haunted by mistakes and sins of the past, paralyzed by your present troubles and afraid of the future? Jesus most passionate desire is to embrace you and take the punishment for the past and the present, and to walk into the future with you. Come worship with us and embrace His Gospel and He will embrace you! We meet for worship on Sundays at 9:00AM for Contemporary Service and 10:30AM for Traditional Service, and our children spend time with God at Sunday School, held during the 10:30AM service. Celebrate Mother's Day by bringing your mother out to church. Everyone is welcome at Grace Lutheran Church!

In Christ

Pastor Ed Skutshek