

The other kingdom: Luke 23:33-43

by [Michael Battle](#) in the [November 7, 2001](#) issue

"See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3).

If human beings grew up individually among wolves, they would not know what to do as human beings. There would not be a human posture or human ways of eating, sitting or walking. Human beings become persons only by living in a human environment. Without it, human personhood does not survive. If we understand this, we can more eagerly participate with God in restoring an environment that is conducive to being human.

The reign of Christ is such an environment. Story after story in scripture attests to a reign in which a new authority is established, one that will help us to fulfill our human potential. Christ, as head of this new order, sends out a band of vulnerable disciples to reshape violent reality into an environment for human flourishing (Luke 10:1-6). This is what we should be doing.

Christ the King is aware that his kind of reign carries a price. The price is that we who follow Christ must now be a different kind of people in the world. Moved deeply by the woman who washes his feet, Jesus models a disruption to the patriarchal kingdoms by teaching the disciples to wash each other's feet. No longer can we live capriciously or aimlessly, following our every whim and addiction. No longer can we live as if only some people are royalty, thereby implying that others are not. Christ's kingdom has defined all of us as people who create environments conducive to being human. We need only look at the world's obsession with violence to see how different Christ's kingdom is.

Consider the HBO series *The Sopranos*, which has significantly raised the level of violence on television. Last year, producers decided that America's favorite mob boss had become a little too lovable. The show was presenting a main character who was too cuddly for a hard-edged series. James Gandolfini, as Tony Soprano, had turned down speaking engagements in elementary schools across the country. So, in the third season of *The Sopranos*, the writers fixed all that. At the end of the season, when Tony's girlfriend threatened to reveal their affair, Tony strangled her, flinging

her body in the air and slamming it to the floor.

What do we Christians do to counter this violence-filled world? We are to be more visible witnesses to Jesus' reign. In order to do this, we must be willing to be human in an environment of vulnerability; that is, to understand that when we are in relationships with others our humanity is bound up in the other's humanity.

Desmond Tutu illustrates this by describing a light bulb that shone brightly and proudly. "[It] began to strut about arrogantly, quite unmindful of how . . . it could shine so brilliantly, thinking that it was all due to its own merit and skill." One day the light bulb is taken out of the socket and placed on a table. "Try as hard as it could, the light bulb could bring forth no light and brilliance. . . . It had never known that its light came from the power station and that it had been connected to the dynamo by little wires and flexes that lay hidden and unseen and totally unsung."

How do we practice the reign of Christ as an environment in which to be fully human? As Christians we can do this by creating worship spaces. We emphasize the church's life of worship, in which human identity is elevated as persons find communion with others and God. We then make sense of how the church and world should proceed to operate—and operate beyond a war involving national, racial and sexual identities. When we learn to worship God in Christ, we learn a different primary identity. Worship helps us see that God has related each of us in a much deeper way than through biology. In Christ's reign the truest community is not biologically connected. Jesus describes his true family by asking, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (Matt. 12: 46-40; Mark 3: 31-35; Luke 8:19-21). Pointing to his disciples, he says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12: 48-50).

What should we be doing? People should not kill each other because they are black or white, gay or straight, Arab or American, but should instead rejoice in how God has created persons differently so that new meanings and identities are always possible. Unlike many violent societies that seek to "fix" who a person or community is, those in Christ's reign seek the other person's best interest. Christ's reign distinguishes human community from the frenzied animal kingdom. Jesus has taught us to act differently, to be human in such a way that we will no longer crucify God in our midst. We will no longer participate in the destruction of the world.