SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — April 3, 2026

Theme for Good Friday: God's Authority (in an Age of Authoritarianism): "From Above" or Alongside? *Or*: The Great Replacement Theory vs. the Great Reconciliation Event

> John 19:10b-11: Pilate said, "Don't you know that I have the authority to let you go, and the authority to crucify you?"
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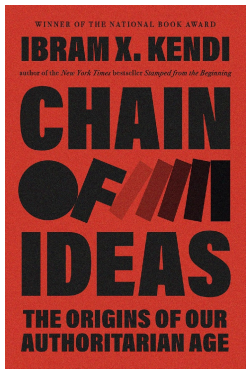
> "You couldn't have any authority at all over me," replied Jesus, "unless it was given to you from above. That's why the person who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

When Jesus tells Pilate that any authority he has comes "from above," does he mean God? Is God's kind of authority one that comes "from above? Or is the whole point of John's Gospel to show us a different kind of authority?

These are crucial questions for us to answer, given the frightening rise of human authoritarianism around the world, including our own country. In tonight's sermon, I stay closer to our text from John's Gospel. Here, I want to sketch what I believe to be the difference in broader strokes, reading two main texts: a brand new book on the history of authoritarianism and the Bible, especially the New Testament.



Ibram X. Kendi's new book, *Chain of Ideas: The Origins of Our Authoritarian Age*, sketches the more recent authoritarian movements under the banner "The Great Replacement Theory." He traces it through many people of the last century, including Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. But this name of the Great Replacement comes from a French author, whose books (*The Great Replacement* in 2011 and *You Will Not Replace Us!* In 2018) are cited by Trump Advisor Steven Miller as the books which guide his mission. Throughout the book, Kendi catalogues how leaders of authoritarian movements across the globe are using this same language. I give you an overview of how this language works in tonight's **Excerpt Page** from Kendi's Prologue. Here I will simply sketch some basics between this theory and what I believe our Christian message is about, especially the core of which we encounter these Three Days. I will refer to the Three Days as "The Great Reconciliation Event."

<u>The Great Replacement Theory</u>

- All power and authority comes from a very few people, or one person, at the top of the pyramid.
- Those in the middle are granted various amounts of privilege from those at the very top — privilege based on various markers of skill and achievement, but even more so on the basis of belonging to various groups: men over women, White people over people of color, abled people over disabled, citizens over immigrants, straight over queer, management over workers, adults over children, etc.
- Those at the bottom, the disadvantaged, are generally trapped there — unless they were to gain help from above.
- Alas, according to the Great Replacement narrative, over the last century some of the wealthiest people (often Jews, according to the anti-Semitic versions) have funded equality movements which threaten to elevate the disadvantaged into higher places, thereby replacing the more deserving above them.
- Democracy has enabled these movements toward equality; the only fix is to accept the rule of authoritarian leaders who can fix the injustice (according to the narrative!) of less worthy people replacing those who are more worthy.

<u>The Great Reconciliation Event</u>

- St. Paul: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us." (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)
- Instead of all authority and power coming from above, God has through Jesus, the Word of love made flesh, come to dwell in our midst with an 'alongside' kind of power — Love
- Jesus goes to great lengths to teach us this authority as a 'master' who serves all people — the footwashing of the Last Supper being one of the most important times.
- Also at the Last Supper, Jesus tells the disciples he will now call them friends, treating them as equals and commanding them to love one another as he has loved them, forming the Beloved Community.
- All the stratifications of human authoritarianism melt away when we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28)