

"You are a King?"
November 24, 2019

John 18: 33-37

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Call to Worship Revelation 1:4,7-8

John, to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace and peace to you from the one who is and was and is coming... Look, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. This is so. Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and was and is coming, the Almighty."

Prayer of Invocation

King Jesus, we gather as followers of your way, inheritors with you of the riches of the kingdom of heaven. For in you, the Christ, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, to come among us, and to remain with us. Help us to see clearly the influences of the political and economic powers of this world. As we worship this day, grant us discernment that we may know how to live faithfully as citizens in your realm and responsibly a citizen in society. Amen.

The Word

John 18:33-37 [Common English Bible](#)

He summoned Jesus and asked, **"Are you the king of the Jews?"**

Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others spoken to you about me?"

Pilate responded, "I'm not a Jew, am I? Your nation and its chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus replied, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here."

"So you are a king?" Pilate said.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice."

Living the Word

Let's begin with a quiz:

1. In the Christian Year, today is the 24th Sunday after
 - a. Easter
 - b. Epiphany
 - c. Pentecost

If you guessed c. Pentecost, you were right.

2. Pentecost is the celebration of
 - a. Jesus
 - b. Holy Spirit
 - c. God

If you guessed b. Holy Spirit, you were right.

3. Today we are celebrating
 - a. Advent
 - b. Black Friday
 - c. Christ the King Sunday

If you guessed b. Black Friday, well, what can I say? The correct answer is c. Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday before we begin Advent, and a new Christian Year. So the point of the last Sunday of the Christian year is the culmination of who Jesus was, and is.

Every year ends with a retelling of Jesus' final days, and next week we begin a four week journey to prepare ourselves for Jesus' birth - Christmas. I know that in our hearts it is much easier to picture Jesus as a baby king, receiving gifts from the foreign wise ones who came to see him. But even at his trial before death, his kingship was still being questioned by the local leader, Pilate, who would have been considered foreign because he was under Caesar's Roman rule, and a wise one, because he was given the authority over the people.

Ironically, and very sadly, the religious leadership, the Jewish High Priests, who were also considered 'wise ones' by their authority, arrested Jesus as a radical stirring up trouble and turned him over to Pilate. By the way - Jesus was a radical trying to stir up trouble, and still is for us today. Today, Christian 'wise ones' work to live into that truth, though it can be frustrating and difficult at times as our routines and order get messed with.

The church proclaims Jesus is king and his kingdom is still to come. The truth of this statement, however, is not obvious to us; so many may think "Jesus, so are you a king?" and "Where is his kingdom?" In the Gospel story, Pilate questions Jesus, face to face, and Jesus makes a cryptic, yet surprising statement in the face of death, about who he is and what kingdom is.

The kingdom of God isn't a church, but the people of the church. The church is where we can come and discover the kingdom of God through the recorded stories and teachings of Christ. What Jesus said to Pilate was: Who have you been listening to? What teachings are you following? Are they of God or of humanity?

It isn't about knowing what week is scheduled to celebrate Pentecost, that is just for those of us who need some order to keep our lives sane. I just put those details out there because there may be others trying to process all of this and need some order as well. It is about recognizing Jesus when we come face to face with him in a given moment and then being wise enough to recognize the authority God has sent to us for our benefit.

Pilate was an outsider to Jesus' world. That day two different trials were going on: one was between Pilate and the Jewish authority and the second was between Pilate and a budding Christian authority. In the midst of this exchange with Jesus he is asking questions to clarify who had the truth. The issue in each trial is Jesus' royal identity and the responses of others to Jesus.

He was only trying to make sense of the confusion. Yet in the end he chose the ones who had the most earthly power, the Jewish authority. They had no clear reasons for Pilate, but they needed his authority for a death sentence. Pilate asks Jesus who he is. Pilate wouldn't know. He lived inside a Roman Cloak, unfamiliar with Jewish religion, outside of how far their authority went according to Roman law.

"*What have you done?*" Pilate would not have know Jesus, and most likely hadn't even heard about him. He had not heard his teaching or seen his miracles. He had not traveled for miles on foot with him, living as the disciples did because they did recognize God in Jesus.

The religious leaders felt threatened by Christ. He hadn't come up through the religious ranks like they did. This isn't the way we do things. We have always done it this way before...Sound familiar? Change? Why? Everything is fine for now. Jesus came to show us that it was not fine.

Pilate probably thought that Jesus was a pawn in the religious community. He also knew that his job was to keep the peace with these Hebrew people and as it happened eliminating Jesus was the easiest road to take. Nip this bud of 'Christ following' before it got any more out of hand.

"My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here." Christ was 'other worldly'; an alien to human ways of being. Sometimes the younger generations seem other worldly to me. Some new ways of doing church are beyond me – alien feeling. But unlike Pilate, I want to seek God's truth and if that means trying some things that seem beyond me in order to draw closer to God, I can try.

Jesus never named himself the King of the Jews. The people did. He was very careful with his words, obviously not to save himself, but for the salvation of humanity. *"I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice."*

Jesus spoke with a confidence in God. Bold and daring, focused on Almighty God, not with fear for what he knew was ahead in the next week. Daring Pilate to take a risk and really seek the truth of God, not rely on what humans had done to religion by making it tied up in knots of unimportant laws. He dared Pilate to see beyond Rome to something greater.

How are we at looking beyond what we have always known to something unworldly? How many scientific advancements in our lifetime, have occurred and blown us way beyond what we knew before? How many of God's miracles have we experienced? Enough to make us want to see beyond the 'real' we know into the unreal?

How many acts of violence – not caused by God – but perpetuated by humans have we heard and seen that have brought uncountable pain and grief? Yet in the midst, those who seek God's truth find confidence to become community through sharing what they have in resources, hugs and prayers, to make healing happen.

This week as you celebrate Thanksgiving, each of us have much to be thankful for. Don't dwell on the things that are wrong, but be thankful for what is right. Seek God's truth in the world around you, knowing that it may seem unbelievable, even other worldly. There are those who will tell you that Thanksgiving is a national holiday, not a religious one. Even so, as all good comes from God by way of the Holy Spirit, it becomes as Christian as you are when you gather with others to praise God for the bounty of food and life we have been offered.

Then next Sunday as we look to a new Christian year and the Advent preparation for the coming of a baby king, I invite you to clarify in your mind who the king is that you will follow, and who are the wise ones you want to learn from and side with. Then when you come face to face with Christ you can sing and declare it with confidence from your trust in your Creator!