

### Call to Worship

Jesus is not only teacher, savior, and friend, he is also King. Christ has come among us not only to heal, to teach, and to care but also to rule. Ultimate authority is in his hands. Jesus Christ is King.

**We have been summoned into the presence of the Creator of the Universe and the one who reigns over history.**

Come, God's people, to take our place next to the Servant and Shepherd King. **Jesus, be in our midst today as we seek to raise your name on high in prayer and praise!**

### Prayer of Invocation

**O Holy Spirit of God, Holy Spirit of Christ, we know that we may not simply call you to come to us as though you are ours to command. We humbly pray that we will recognize your presence here this day, for we would be your people. Amen.**

### The Word John 14:12-14; Philippians 4:4-9 (Common English Bible)

Jesus said: "I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it."

**Paul said: "Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving Thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.**

From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you."

### Living the Word

'Take me to your leader...' This line has been used in cartoons and movies since the 1960s. The scene is usually some strange looking creature from another planet, recently landed on earth and looking for 'the one' in charge of things.

Most of us don't expect to ever live out this scene in our lifetimes, but maybe we will...In December 2011 NASA's Kepler telescope spotted a special planet, named Kepler-22b. The planet has temperatures in the 70s, and now, scientists are using radio technology to listen for possible life on a planet other than Earth. Chances are we will not ever get to visit there, as that planet is 600 light years away, but one never knows!

If someone arrived here and said "Take me to your leader, what would your response be? Who is your leader?"

- Is it your boss? That may be the person that leads your actions for a good portion of your waking hours. They may be the one in charge of what you make financially. They may be the one who decides what you do and when you will do it. Are they your leader?
- OR is it your parents? Maybe if you are still a child, as then they have control over your life, but who leads you as an adult? Is it your spouse, who helps you stay on track in good times and the bad?
- Or maybe when you think of your leader you think of the President of the Country? They are a leader, and good or bad, we do have to follow what the people decide is the best choice every four years. I wonder...who are their leaders?
- The Wisconsin United Methodist Church has a leader: Bishop Hee-Soo Jung. He has been here to visit our church. He has been the Wisconsin United Methodist Bishop for 8 years. What do you think? Is he one of your leaders?
- Maybe it is me. Maybe you think that I am your leader...be careful, I am only human, you know! I do pray that I have been able to lead all of us where God would have us go. I have made a few mistakes, but I will always try to point us to Christ.

Hopefully we would all point you from us to the leader, Jesus, who leads us to God. Hopefully we would point you to the truth as we know it: A solid stability with God's will so that we think in terms of authenticity and understanding. Isn't this how you follow the leader? Looking for the truth and integrity in what they do and what they say? Of course, there is the intellectual truth. The 'right and wrong' answers to 'what is truth', then there is the revelation of Jesus Christ truth, which follows little reality as we humans know it. If we are to be Christians, we are obliged to look beyond just trying to understand, and make some sense and order out of this world.

We are to seek and know God, living as dynamic witnesses as we move through our lives. In Jesus we see a model for our lives, sharing who our leader is and what we are called to do as people of mission and love for the world. Jesus had an active prayer life, with much reflection as to the events around him. He was also careful in his speech. But it was in his doing that he leads as well. Meeting and caring and loving and teaching. As our leader he can show us the way.

There were two games we often played as kids. One was 'Follow the Leader', we would march around, doing whatever the leader did before us. After a time we would trade off and another would lead for a while. The leader would share their favorite movements: twirling their arms, marching, weaving around the furniture.

Then they would run out of ideas and they would turn over the leadership and the next person who would have everyone jumping and touching their toes and kissing grandma. In follow the leader, the leader goes first and shows everyone how and what to do. They are authentic in what they want to do, because they know that they will do it first.

There is another game we played called 'Simon Says'. In this game the leader would tell everyone what to do and stand and watch if they did it right. If they didn't do it right they were demoted in the game. The leader would be fast talking as to catch up the others and I don't remember the leader sharing their turn as leader, but instead working to make others do things they would not want to do and then not wanting to give up their position of authority.

It was as if they had their own power agenda in the game, to control others. Authenticity or Agenda, what kind of leader do you want to follow?

Are you the leader? Are you the one that others follow? You might say, No, no, I'm no leader, but like it or not your example leads others. There are children growing and watching how you lead ever where you go. They figure you out – authentic or agenda driven – by who you are, your actions, your words, your lifestyle.

No pressure, but if you consider it you will know that in your life there are people that you were led by in some direction that you wish you hadn't followed, and others that you are glad you did follow. My suggestion to those of you who don't feel comfortable being a leader is to point toward someone else who is.

In today's scripture from the book of John, Pontius Pilate asks Jesus "Are You the Leader?" Jesus answers the question with a question. This is something he often did when he knew the other person was trying to trick or test him. Jesus responds with "Why do you ask?" Is the question coming from your heart or is it because you have listened to the crowds and let them lead you? Is your question Authentic or Agenda driven?

Jesus is in search of an encounter with the real Pilate. He knows that Pilate is trying hard to keep control over a situation that he is unsure of. Jesus is inviting Pilate to let go of his intellectual truth of the way things need to be and to have an authentic encounter with God. But Pilate rejects the offer to share himself and tells Jesus – "We are different, I am not like you." He would rather be led by the social culture of a fickle crowd outside than to save his soul, because he cannot trust enough.

Jesus admits that they are not alike, telling Pilate "I am not from this world." Wouldn't this kind of answer make you stop and wonder? If someone told you that they were an alien, you would be looking for some kind of sign of that. The old movies and TV shows had little green Martians that only vaguely resembled us, but in more recent years on TV, the aliens have become much more like us.

Even so, remember Pilate was living 2000 years ago. The thoughts of aliens weren't even a thought in their understanding. When Jesus said: "I am not of this world." It may have had little meaning for Pilate. But even today, if someone said to you "I am not of this world." Would you take them seriously?

Well, Pilate basically ignores Jesus statement and asks again if Jesus is a leader. Jesus sidesteps this by turning it back to Pilate "That is what you say." I wonder if Jesus is telling Pilate that Pilate claims to be a leader, has the authority, but isn't sure about what to do with it. Pilate has hesitation in his direction, but not enough to consider another way to go. Finally his power agenda wins out and he sends Jesus to the cross.

Pilate wants to categorize Jesus into an illegal move to be condemned for – the title "King of the Jews." In essence Jesus is letting Pilate know that he is a part of something that is beyond earthly categories. Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon wrote a book together entitled "Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong".

They take Jesus' statement and say that as Christians we are all to be 'resident aliens'. This is not our home, just a stop over to something greater. We are to live 'In the world, but not of the world.' Our leader is Christ, and if we follow his leadership, then we also are not of this world. Christ, who continues to point us to God.

Accepting the truth, following Christ as Leader can be difficult. He died for his beliefs and his leadership. Few in our part of the world die for beliefs and leaderships, so today we can be a Christian and stay under the radar, unlike the Christians of Pilate's time. But because it is so easy for us, we have become complacent. It is easier to follow the leader if the rest of the crowd is already doing that.

With so many in need, we may be the ones who have something to share.

- This year be a leader by stepping up and ringing bells for Salvation Army. Yes, it is now cold out there, but it is even colder if you have to sleep in your car because there is no room in the inn. Locally the need for ringers is great. Sign up at [www.ringbells.org](http://www.ringbells.org).
- Authentic or Agenda: Where does Black Friday fit into this? Who is your leader during this next week? No one is judging, because most of us are not done shopping yet. I admit I have been shopping online Early Black Friday Deals, yet mostly online. My my list is short this year: I'm still looking for some stocking stuffers for the boys and a couple of toys for Operation Christmas. I have fun buying toys for some who may not have anything otherwise. I was able to take the advertisers leadership that said to buy, buy, buy and control it by leading for myself.
- Christmas buying – including Black Friday, is something that the culture of this world has tried to sell to you. Ask yourself if your shopping is about what Simon says you are to do or is it about following an authentic leader for your life. A few years ago, it was decided by my siblings, to give more gifts to missions and less to each other. What a great idea. I have lots of choices when it comes to missions.

Christmas can be a time to be led, but keep in mind who you want your leader to be. On this Sunday each year we re-crown Christ as our King. As a congregation we sing that we claim him as our leader, knowing that he isn't even of this world. We declare that we will not give our allegiance to any other person or power that claims to rule over our lives. Yet can we continue to live this claim when we walk out the doors and leave this place?

To live authentically, you need to accept the truth as God gives it to you. If you live on hearsay, and work to hear what you want to hear, you have your own agenda. Jesus still offers the invitation to be authentic about how it is with us, and in being authentic we allow ourselves to be led by the shepherd king into abundant life.

Next week is the beginning of Advent. It is a time of anticipation as we continue our journey toward Christ. Begin the season by following the 'Christ miracle' to God and God's gifts of love; each year the church moves ever closer to the light of Christ, which shines from a place that is 'out of this world.' Christmas is coming...buy what you need to, just don't get caught in the web of someone else's agenda for your shopping...Be a leader by pointing others to, and following, the leader: Christ the King.