

## “Christ the King”

November 25, 2018

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: John 18: 33-38a

Though his encounter with Jesus is not very long, Pilate recognizes its depth. This morning’s passage is really deep stuff, so much so that it ends with Pilate asking perhaps the deepest question every asked, “What is truth?”

The conversation starts with a discussion about kingship. If Jesus is indeed a rival king who is becoming a threat to Rome, Pilate needs to act quickly and decisively to negate the threat; but if He is of no real danger to Roman authority, then Pilate should simply hand Him back to His accusers and remove himself from the middle of their conflict. So Pilate asks Jesus point blank, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replies, “My kingship is not of this world.” In other words, “I am a king, but I am not a king like you.” Jesus gives an example of what He means. He says “if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight to keep me from being handed over to you.” That makes sense, because as Pilate understands it, the king is at the top of the pyramid and ideally every subject would be willing to lay down their life for their king. But that did not happen. Peter started to fight for Jesus but Jesus not only made him stop and put his sword away, but healed the temple servant who was injured. In Pilate’s world, what Jesus did makes no sense. Pilate knows what it means to be king. The king is the one with power and authority. Being king is not only about wielding that power and authority, but wielding it in a way that allows him to remain the king. Whether that means economic exploitation or intimidation or violence; wielding his power in a way that allows him to continue wielding his power is what it means to be king. All his subjects are there to serve him. But Jesus comes along and washes His disciples’ feet. He initiates loving conversations and action toward the poor, the lonely, the sick and the outcast. His faithful followers do the same. Like the old hymn says, “for not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums; with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes.” (Lead on O King Eternal) Jesus heals those with nothing to offer Him and does a terrible job of coddling those with power and influence. Jesus is right, His kingship is not of this world. This becomes eminently clear when things get desperate and the kings need to roll out their ultimate weapon. Pilate and the Jewish authorities roll out their ability to kill – to take life. Jesus rolls out His ability to give life after death. One kills to protect their position of power, the other gives their life to protect, free and empower others. One is served by their subjects and offers the lives of those subjects as ransom; the other ransoms His own life for the sake of his subjects.

As Pilate and Jesus talk, we see two very different understandings of what it means to be king. Which is the true definition of a king? Which is the way of the true king? Or as Pilate asks in verse 38, “What is truth?”

Pilate asked the question for us, but we are the ones who need to answer it each and every day. We get to choose. Which king rules? Which king rules in our life and our world? We choose. We choose in silly things like sports. If you have heard yourself say, “If you ain’t cheating, you

ain't trying", or affirm that "sportsmanship is for church league, at any other level it is about winning", then you are a firm resident in Pilate's kingdom. In everyday happenings like work. If you put in the minimal amount of effort it takes to survive and get your pay check, then you are a vote for Pilate as king because the whole world is here to serve you. If you actually go to work to serve, not be consumed by, but serve the company who is paying you, then you are a vote for Jesus as king because Jesus is into serving others. In important things like relationships. If you approach a relationship with your eyes set on what you can get out of it and manipulate your relationships to get what you want, then you are a Pilate follower. If you think "what can I do to make her smile", or "what can I do to make him feel loved", then you are siding with King Jesus. When problems arise. If you are all about assigning blame and punishment, you are a Pilate supporter. If you deal in forgiveness and relationship repair, you know Jesus as the truth.

It is not easy to consistently be a follower of Jesus as your king. We are tempted by the allure of this world, of comparing ourselves with our neighbor, of wanting what they have and being tempted to do what we have to do to get it. The allure of the secular, of worldly power, of being served by others; there is a part of us that really wants to be the center of the world. We want to be king, not serve Jesus as king. But remember: Pilate's rule brings terror, even in the midst of calm, while Jesus' rule brings peace, even in the midst of terror. Pilate's kingship thrives on intimidation and violence, while Jesus' kingship knows love conquers all. Pilate's authority rules here but ends here, while Jesus' authority comes from the God of eternity and is not from here, and it does not end here. Pilate has been dead for almost 2000 years while Jesus lives.

In verse 37 Jesus says, "for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Today our Scripture lesson puts before us two definitions of a true king. With the choices we make – the silly choices, the daily work choices, the relationship choices, the means-to-a-end choices – with every choice we make, we choose which king rules over us. Choose the king that leads to life.

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