

Christ the King Sunday – 2021
(Last Sunday of the Church Year)
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
Revelation 1:4-8
John 18:33-37

Whose perspective do you trust – Pontius Pilate’s or Jesus’? Two different world views, two vastly different perspectives on reality, on life and death and power and truth and what is essential. Whose perspective do you trust – Pontius Pilate’s or Jesus’? They don’t agree, these two. There is a clash taking place in this encounter. You should not view this dialogue as a historically stale record. You should not view this encounter as merely a highly charged dialogue between two figures in a drama that has been played out and now is just a relic of history. This snippet from John’s Gospel is *alive*. God chose to have this meeting recorded in the Scripture because the dynamic that was played out between those two is ongoing. The substance of the conversation between Pilate and the Lord Christ is perpetually contemporary. Folks who choose not to see the universal tension in this confrontation are willfully blind. Christians, on the other hand, are eager to learn of it. Christians are eager to grow by it. Christians are eager to see the world as God sees it, eager to see the Lord as He truly is, eager to see salvation as a present reality – full and free and fabulous. Well, here it is, Christians, your salvation on display.

Appearances; Pilate was a slave to them. He was the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. He saw the world in a particular way. Pilate trusted what he saw, believed what he saw, based his life on what he saw. Jesus was brought before Pilate and what the governor of Judea saw was pathetic. The Jews had accused Jesus of insurrection. “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2). The tribute bit is clearly a lie. Pilate takes a look at Jesus and is both incredulous and amused: “*You* are the king of the Jews?” (John 18:33 – my translation). Jesus had none of the trappings of power, no worldly appearance of authority, no tangible evidence of a kingdom.

This encounter is not an accident. You are made the audience of this discussion because God wants you to hear it, wants you to learn from it. The question within it is implicit: “In what way do worldly appearances rule *your* heart?” What are the marks of Christ’s Kingdom? How have you been taught to see His kingdom, to recognize it, to embrace it?

My kingdom is not of this world. Not long after this discussion in Pilate’s headquarters, Pilate had Jesus flogged. Do you know what that means? The Lord Christ, the eternal Son of God, in whom resides cosmic dominion, He suffered a massive beating. Innocent, He gives His back to the whip. The regal Source of Life had His flesh savagely opened. Soldiers mocked Him, twisting together a crown of thorns, putting it on His head, and draping a purple robe on Him. They struck Him, and said: “Hail, King of the Jews!” (John 19:1-3). After Jesus submitted to this horrific treatment, Pilate trots the Lord in front of the crowd and says this: “Behold your King!” (John 19:14). Pilate meant it as an insult. That anyone, so seemingly impotent, could be likened to a king – it was a colossal insult. But the irony is that it is so divinely true! He is our glorious King precisely as He is mocked. He is our blessed King precisely as He is beaten and abused and flogged and crucified and rejected. Glory and power and dominion and honor and

might and majesty are His forever and ever! His kingdom is not of this world but it comes plowing into this world by way of His sacrifice and His love. Blood inaugurates His eternal kingdom; blood and shame and death.

This world is in a twist. Our world, our nation is directionless. What were shared values are being shredded. So many view it as a political battle. It is not. That our political institutions are being tested is because our Western principles, taken from biblical wisdom, are being rejected by those who want to rule the world in defiance of God. Politicians are reconstructing the Tower of Babel. There is no humility. There is no deference to God. And the reaction on the part of some is to marshal a commensurate force to push back on the other side. So much time and energy and thought and passion is being directed to a worldly kingdom. Christians have, in some measure, traded their birthright for a bowl of this political gruel. Christ's kingdom is among us and it is magnificent. It operates according to eternal truths which God has anchored in your heart. You are a citizen of *this* Kingdom, a priest and a queen and a handmaiden and a kinsman redeemer in the Kingdom of Christ. The first shall be last and the last shall be first – that describes Christ and it describes His kingdom. Love those who hate you. It is more blessed to give than to receive. When we are weak then we are strong. The unbelieving, vain, and power infatuated world hears these things and dismisses them out of hand. What about us?

His kingdom is not of this world. We are not of this world. We are the thief, crucified with Christ. He prayed, that man. He had no place else to look. In death, the thief's eyes were directed to Christ, directed to where hope was found. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Today His Kingdom is here. We pray as He taught us: "Thy Kingdom Come." "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity" (Small Catechism).

The world-redeeming Savior is our King. Only His blood washes you of sin. Only His love has sanctified you, made you holy, prepared you for heaven. The world-redeeming Savior is your King. He has prepared a place at His royal table for you. Christ the King serves His subjects. A life greater than your own – the King serves you with His life. Kindness, gentleness, mercy, forgiveness – the King gives and He gives and He gives. That is our way – kindness, gentleness, mercy, forgiveness – let us give and give and give and thereby show the world to Whom we belong, show the world a better way. Many in this world will side with Pontius Pilate. When Christ's church echoes Jesus' words: "Everyone on the side of truth listens to my voice" the unbelieving world harrumphs and says: "What is truth?" You know it – the truth. With the eyes of your heart, you see it. Christ crucified *is* the kingdom. Christ's sacrifice for sinners is the *epitome* of truth. We hear it; our hearts luxuriate in it when we hear it. We hear His voice.

This kingdom comes in a way that the world and our own sinful flesh doesn't expect. Christ's kingdom comes meekly but with great power. Nations rise and fall; earthly rulers have their momentary influence but the Easter King, the King who rose from the dead, brings life that has no end. Your citizenship is in heaven. Christ's kingdom is not of this world; it is heavenly. In this life you have known the bracing joy of His kingdom for His kingdom invades this creation.

But you have a future beyond here, beyond now, beyond this creation. Heaven is your home. Not one of us wants to live here forever. The reason church is so sweet is because it is a foretaste of the feast to come. St. Paul, with heaven in his eyes, wrote this: "Now we see through a glass darkly, then we shall see face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Your King's face! One day; one great and glorious and awesome and delightful day... you will see the face of Christ the King. Goodness and beauty and truth will sear your soul as you look upon the face of Christ the King. Every knee will bow, the acclaim of His glory will fill the air, and the light of His presence will make your spirit soar. On that Day, you will know the veracity, the truthfulness of His Word. All that He has done will fit perfectly in your mind and you will rejoice that you have been part of His Kingdom.

Hail, O Christ our King. Come soon; come and claim Your bride, Your church, and let us taste Your kingdom in full. Until that day, bless us and keep us, the happy subjects of Your kingdom.