

A Sermon by Mr. Jonathan Pucick, Seminarian  
Christ the King (B)  
Sunday, November 25, 2018

*Samuel 23:1-7 | Psalm 132:1-13 (14-19)  
Revelation 1:4b-8 | John 18:33-27*

*Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."*

"What have you done?" In other words, "Why are you here?" The question is terse and sincere, but it is not the first question that Pilate asks Jesus who stands before him. Instead, he inquires, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus knows Pilate's question is ridiculous on its own accord. Obviously, Jesus isn't a king, at least not in any political sense of the term. He wants to get to the truth behind Pilate's question. We need the truth here, right? This is after all an interrogation. While today may be Christ the King Sunday where we celebrate our Lord sitting on a throne, here in our Gospel we find him on trial.

And like any good Rabbi looking for truth, Jesus answers Pilate's question by asking another question, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

Here we get the truth along with a very frustrated Roman governor, who retorts, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus replies, "My kingdom is from this world. If [so], my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over...But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Jesus is making it clear to Pilate that this sort of kingdom does not play by the rules of Rome or any other nation and thus will not acquire power through fighting or brute force.

"So you are a king?" Pilate asks this with what seems to be equal parts accusation and curiosity. What kind of king is this, and what kind of rules does this kingdom play by?

"The Truth," says Jesus, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." The Roman Empire may speak domination, but the language of this kingdom is simply telling the truth, and listening to the truth. "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice," Jesus says.

It's a bow on top, and it's a nice place to end. But Pilate asks one final question that doesn't make into our lectionary text: "What is truth?"

It's a question that doesn't get an answer or even a direct response from Jesus, and it rings eerily relevant in our postmodern ears. In fact, we could answer Pilate's question with a slew of other questions, "What kind of truth? Your truth? My truth? Are you referring to that which is factually true or something more esoteric or abstract? What truth are you talking about?"

"What is truth?" Pilate seems to know that this is how his world works. Truth in his world is a construct, crafted by those with the power and influence to wield it to their own advantage. A sort of, "Might makes right," mentality. It is this kind of domination that Rome and every other empire on earth has used to assert control, creating normalcy out of violence and injustice. This mentality seemed to work well within antiquity, except if you were, of course, one without power. If this was you, your story, your truth, was assigned for you, and those who rebelled against that assignment threatened the Roman Empire and ran the risk of death. This is where we find Jesus, who has a different story to tell. He testifies to a different truth, that of his kingdom which is not of this world but is still for it, as N.T. Wright states, the "...truth is what happens when humans use words to reflect God's wise ordering of the world and so shine light into its dark corners, bringing judgement and mercy where it is badly needed."<sup>1</sup>

Before we simply absorb this truth into our own postmodern ideologies, just another story in our bag, we have to reckon with the paradigm presented in John's gospel, that the answer to Pilate's question is not a formula or factual statement, but is carried in flesh, blood, and voice. What is truth? Jesus is the Truth. Our incarnate Christ the King tells this truth through his life, death, and resurrection, turning the lies of this world upside down. In doing so, he shows us the way to freedom and liberation as he says to his disciples, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." This is the truth to which we belong, the truth to which we are called to speak. The way, the truth, and the life, Jesus Christ our King, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

On trial with Jesus, we are warned that our allegiance to Christ the King will put us at odds with earthly kingdoms and authorities. This allegiance is not partisan, but it is surely and inevitably political. The way of Christ is one of truth and reconciliation over violence and injustice. It is one that reaches across divisive boundaries, liberates the oppressed, and brings dead things back to life. Most scandalous, it is one that dares to call the divine a loving Father, to work for the revelation and realization that we are beloved children of God.

What is truth? The Truth is our Jesus on trial, on the way to the cross, to death, to resurrection. On the way to restoring all things in him, to liberating those divided and held captive by this broken world. On the way to bringing all things together under his most gracious rule. Our allegiance is to this king, who speaks truth in the face of earthly power. And this is the way to which we are also called.

So where is your allegiance? In other words, why are you here? As you reflect, hear the final words of Martin Luther's hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God,

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, N. T. 2012. *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*. 1st ed. New York: HarperOne.

“That word above all earthly powers,  
No thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours  
Through Him who with us sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill:  
God’s truth abideth still,  
His Kingdom is forever.”  
Amen