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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
24 November 2024

Sermon on John 18:33-37

Worship Theme:

CHRIST OUR KING REIGNS

On this last Sunday of the Church Year, we rejoice in the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation through Christ our King. We rejoice because our King reigns—the king who came to be crucified for us (Gospel); the king who is eternal and rules forever and ever (1st Reading); the king who has “freed us from our sins by his blood” and comes on the clouds as the Alpha and the Omega (2nd Reading). Today we rejoice that Jesus Christ is our King who reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Sermon Theme: **“What It's All About”**

1. Are You a King?
2. You Are a King!

As he walks back into the palace again, he shakes his head, wondering what in the world he's gotten himself mixed up in. He sits down on his chair and summons the man at the middle of this whole mess. As the man is brought before him, he can't help but think, “There's no way. Just look at the guy! He wears the plain clothing of a poor man. He has no servants, no army, no palace or throne. And the very people he supposedly rules over just handed him over to us because they want him put to death! You can't make this stuff up – it's too unbelievable!” So *Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”*

Can you sympathize with Pilate a little? I can't help but think that Roman governors holding trial for a so-called king betrayed by his own people wasn't a terribly common experience. What a crazy situation! Yet here he sat, a “king” in front of him, and the man's own people practically rioting outside, screaming “Crucify him!” He had to ask – “*Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?*” **Are YOU really a KING?!**

Pilate certainly isn't the only human being who ever misunderstood or questioned Jesus' kingship, of course. Sadly, we're very good at it too. After all, we so easily say “Jesus is King!”, but do we live like it?

Do we live like citizens of the King of heaven and earth, always trusting that his perfect rule and will is what happens? Or do we post something on Facebook that says “Jesus is King” in order to subtly complain about whatever is happening in the world that we don't like?

Do we confidently go through each day as if our King has the entire universe under control, or do we worry and fret about every last little thing that comes our way, certain that unless WE do something about it, this will be the end of us?

Do we treat the one we claim as our “King” more like a divine vending machine or wishing well, assuming that as long as we toss in the right amount of prayer and praise, then whatever we think and want is what will happen? (And if it

DOESN'T, then we completely question his kingship and power and authority and his ability to take care of anything at all in this world or in our lives!) We're very good at remembering his almighty kingship when things are going the way we assume they should, but as soon as something different happens or something we personally don't agree with, well then someone must have dethroned the King, because this just isn't right! We treat Jesus' kingship as if it should always equal the "proper" laws, rules, and behavior in our nation and the people around us. And if anything looks remotely out of place, we cry out, "IF you really are in charge, why is this happening? Earth shouldn't look like this!! **Are you a KING** or not?!"

O God, have mercy on us and forgive us for our foolish wicked thoughts. Then help us to hear Jesus himself explain his kingship.

"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders." Jesus didn't come to look like an earthly king, with a nation and a palace and a crown of jewels and a flowing royal robe. He didn't come to gather tremendous wealth and riches or to be honored and respected by other kings through tribute or gifts to him. He didn't come to command vast amounts of servants and armies, to wage war against other rulers or to defend him against anyone who tried to capture and harm him. That's not **what it's all about** in Jesus' Kingdom!

But he certainly does have one: *"My kingdom is from another place."* Jesus' rule wasn't just in a location on earth – it's far bigger than that. Jesus' people weren't just the Jews in that place at that time – it's far bigger than that. His kingdom is not really a physical place at all! And he demonstrated this by what would happen next. This conversation between Jesus and Pilate is in the middle of the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Jesus was about to show the entire world what he came to do as King and what kind of a kingdom he truly had.

In the process, he invites Pilate and us to consider that more seriously. He invites us to put aside all the things we think we know about kings and kingdoms and power and authority, and to consider them in an entirely different light in reference to Jesus. For Jesus, being a King meant putting his people and their needs before his own. For Jesus, a kingdom was all about the people, not a place. For Jesus, power was not something to be used for his own benefit and advantage, but rather for the eternal good of his people. And for Jesus, authority was not something he would use to demand obedience and punish disobedience, although he certainly has every right to do so; rather his authority would be used to banish and condemn forever the enemies who threatened his beloved family. Jesus did not have a country or nation he needed to protect; he had people he needed to save.

How would he do that? By being not an earthly king, but a Christ King. Only a few hours later, Jesus would be treated in the most un-kingly way imaginable as he was nailed to a cross to die. Yet as un-kingly as it was, it was the most Christ-like thing he had ever done. "Messiah" in Hebrew and "Christ" in Greek both mean "anointed one." In the Old Testament, they anointed prophets,

priests, and kings as the ones who were set apart to do the special work given to them. When Jesus entered our world as the promised Savior from sin, he came in every way as the Anointed One of God, the Messiah, the Christ, our Prophet, Priest, and King. He came as Prophet to proclaim to all the world the good news that God's promise to save humanity was being kept. And as we were reminded again just last Sunday, as Priest, Jesus came both to offer the sacrifice for sin and BE the sacrifice for sin.

That all came to its fulfillment at the cross. There Jesus bled and died, paying the debt for every single human being and forgiving every sin – fully, freely, and forever. He perfectly lived every second of his existence in complete obedience to every Law of God. He willingly died the most unimaginable death as the payment and punishment for sin, a death died on our behalf and in our place. Then he victoriously rose to life again, conquering the worst enemies of God's people – sin, death, and Satan – forever! It's not an accident that we so often end our Church Year by celebrating "Christ the King" Sunday. We do so not just because we have a King, but because our King is CHRIST – Jesus, the Anointed Savior of all.

By grace, after seeing everything Jesus has done to save us and make us his people, we can take Pontius Pilate's words and make them a joyful exclamation of faith: "You are a king, then!" While Pilate likely did not understand everything wrapped up in that sentence, it nevertheless remains 100% true: Jesus Christ is King. He successfully completed his mission on earth to save his Creation from the ravaging caused by sin and death. Now his people are saved. Earth will never be the final resting place for the people of God – we will rise, just as he did, to live forever in his glorious eternal kingdom of glory in heaven.

This is the very greatest news ever! Because of Christ the King, we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom and dearly-loved subject of the Lord of Grace, Mercy, and Peace. And that's the truth! No matter how much the devil, world, and our own sinful nature try to convince us otherwise, we truly are God's holy redeemed people. We never grow tired of hearing this good news, and we never stop needing to hear it, study it, learn it, and share it with as many people as we possibly can, because that's **What It's All About!** For Jesus, saving us was everything. Now as King, he rules in our hearts by grace through faith and rules over everything in the universe for our eternal good. Because of that, our entire Church Year – every single time we gather around God's Word together – is rightly focused on him. Christ is our King and our King is Christ – what amazing grace God has shown us. No matter what happens in life and no matter what it looks like, Jesus, **you are King** forever and ever - thank you for this powerful comforting truth! Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.