

Christ the King

John 18:33-37

INTRODUCTION

In the Pride Lands of Tanzania, a pride of lions ruled over their kingdom from high atop Pride Rock. Our story begins with a birth announcement. King Mufasa and Queen Sarabi's newborn son, Simba, is presented to the gathering animals by Rafiki the mandrill.

- One day as the circle of life runs its course, Simba will become king.
 - Simba likes that idea at first.
 - In fact, very early in the show Simba will sing a song titled "I Just Can't Wait to be King."
- But alas! There is a sinister part of the story lurking in the shadows. Mufasa's younger brother, Scar, also covets the throne. And he is willing to do whatever it takes to get it.

Everyone, it seems, wants to be king. And that is not unusual.

- In the tales of Sherwood Forest, Prince John tries to eliminate King Richard, which gives rise to Robin Hood.
- Even in the biblical story, especially in the Northern Kingdom after the death of Solomon, people were vying to be king – even to the point of assassinating the current king to get the job.
- Now ... let's be honest ... haven't YOU thought the world would be a much better place if you were just named "King of the World" for a year?
 - By simple edict you could fix every problem that exists.
 - We just can't wait to be king!

Our Gospel lesson this morning (John 18:33-37) is a story about kings. It is a text that is usually read during Lent. In fact, we read it every year on Good Friday as we hear the story of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.

But today it shows up in our liturgical calendar – not on Good Friday but on the last Sunday of the Christian calendar year.

- Today is the day that many Christian churches designate as "Christ the King Sunday."
- In the structure of our liturgical calendar, this is the last day of the year, and as such it brings to culmination the story of Jesus.
- Next Sunday when you come to church, in the Scriptures we will read, Jesus will not even be a baby yet. He will still be in heaven waiting to be born! Mary won't even be pregnant.
- But today, the whole plan of salvation is done. Jesus came, He lived, died, was buried, resurrected and ascended into heaven. He unleashed the church to be His witnesses. And today we celebrate His victory over sin, death and the devil.
- We proclaim:

CHRIST IS KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS!

But what does that mean for us today?

- When we say “Christ is King,” what do we mean? What should we mean?

In today’s text Jesus is on trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. He was hauled there by the Jewish religious leaders. Among the accusations they made was that Jesus was a threat to the Roman authorities because He claimed to be king.

As we look at the encounter Pontius Pilate had with Jesus, I think we will make THREE DISCOVERIES.

DISCOVERY #1: IS JESUS KING?

That is the first question Pilate asks Jesus:

Pilate then ... asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (John 18:33)

Is Jesus a king or not? Is he just another madman who has delusions of grandeur and fancies himself to be king.

In 1354, during the Hundred Years’ War, a merchant named Giannino di Guccio became convinced that he was actually King Jean I—the rightful heir to the Capetian crown, who was thought to have died in infancy.

- Over the following years, he trekked through Italy, Hungary, and France seeking recognition from various sovereigns; forged documents supporting his claim; attired himself in royal garb; hired a mercenary army; incurred the wrath of Pope Innocent VI; and escaped, briefly, from prison.
- He was eventually proven to be mentally deranged. Was Jesus another one of ‘those guys?’

Pilate asked an important question, because if Jesus was a king, then he was a threat.

- It was already hard to keep the Jewish people in line.
- The Jews deeply resented the presence of the Romans in their country – and especially resented the Romans bossing them around.
- There were political action groups – like the Zealots – who were actively at work trying to figure out how to drive the Romans out of Palestine.
- If Jesus was associated with a group like that, he was not only a threat, he was an immediate problem.
- And Pilate did not need another problem.

There are four kings in a deck of cards. Real life is not like that. There is room for only one king. There may be several queens and a bunch of Jacks, but in real life there is only one king.

- And if Jesus is king, what does that make Pilate? He knows he is only a governor, and kings trump governors every time.

This is a question every human must ask at some point in time. Every person’s life will intersect with Jesus at some point. And like, when we come face-to-face with Jesus we have to answer the question Pilate asked:

Is Jesus king?

DISCOVERY #2: WHERE DOES JESUS REIGN?

If Pilate was to conclude that Jesus is a king, then the next logical question is “Where is your kingdom?”

Jesus addresses this second discovery question in verse 36:

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” (John 18:36)

Another place? Is that Urbana? South Charleston? Where are we talking about?

- If Jesus is not claiming kingship over Palestine, the threat to Pilate is not as great.

You can almost sense the mood in the passage changing here.

- Pilate is OK with Jesus being a king, as long as he is king someplace else.
- Jesus can be the “King of the Jews” as long as he does not see himself in charge of the same Jews that Pilate is in charge of.

Do you remember the sign Pilate posted on the cross above the head of Jesus?

Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. (John 19:19)

Ultimately Pilate would rule:

With this (Pilate) went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against (Jesus). (John 18:37)

If Jesus wants to be king of Urbana, fine. As long as he stays out of Springfield.

But Pilate missed the point of what Jesus said. Remember?

Jesus said, “**My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” (John 18:36)

Jesus does not seek to rule in towns and countries. His is a spiritual kingdom, not a worldly one.

- Jesus wants to rule in the hearts of people.
- When Paul writes to the Colossians, he urges them to:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ... (Colossians 3:15)

Oh, no! Suddenly it gets tough again. I can't ship Jesus off to another location because he wants to be king of me. My heart. My life.

- It's not enough for him to be A king. He wants to be MY king.

DISCOVERY #3: WHICH SIDE AM I ON?

This is the third discovery question. Look at verse 37:

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37)

What Jesus proclaims is truth. That is why He came. So truth becomes the great dividing line in people. Jesus is king in whoever aligns themselves with the truth he proclaims.

J. P. Moreland, in his book *Apologetic Reasoning and the Christian Mind*, illustrates the importance of being on the right side of truth. He writes:

- "One afternoon I was sharing the gospel in a student's dorm room at the University of Vermont. The student began to espouse ethical relativism: 'Whatever is true for you is true for you and whatever is true for me is true for me. But no one should force his or her views on other people since everything is relative.'"
- Moreland says, "I knew that if I allowed him to get away with ethical relativism, there could be for him no such thing as real, objective sin measured against the real, objective truth of God, and thus no need of a Savior. I thanked the student for his time and began to leave his room."
- On the way out, I picked up his stereo and started out the door with it.
- 'Hey, what are you doing?' he shouted.
- 'I am leaving your room with your stereo.'
- 'You can't do that,' he gushed."
- But Moreland said, "I happen to think it is permissible to steal stereos if it will help a person's religious beliefs, and I myself could use a nice stereo to listen to Christian music in my morning devotions. Now I would never try to force you to accept my moral beliefs in this regard because, as you said, everything is relative and we shouldn't force our ideas about truth on others. Surely you aren't going to force on me your belief that it is wrong to steal your stereo, are you?"
- Moreland was eventually able to lead this student to Christ, so the story has a happy ending.

Making Jesus king of your life results in the alignment of your life with his teachings.

APPLICATION

So the question is not "Is Jesus king?" It is "Is Jesus MY king?"

The goal of "Christ the King Sunday" is well expressed in the words of an old hymn we sang in my church as a kid:

King of my life, I crown Thee now.
Thine will the glory be.

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It's one thing to acknowledge Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. It is something far more important to proclaim Jesus as MY KING and MY LORD.

To quote a line from yet one more hymn:

Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall--
Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all;
Hearken! what meaneth the sudden call!
What will you do with Jesus?

What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be;
Someday your heart will be asking,
"What will He do with me?"

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Amen.