

## A King Unlike any Other

Christ the King, YrB John 18:33-37 November 21, 2021  
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Jesus is alone. The disciples are gone, having fled into the night in fear and terror when the soldiers come to arrest Jesus. The crowds who hailed him as the “son of David” when he entered Jerusalem have now rejected him and the religious authorities have condemned him. Jesus stands alone as he faces Pilate for judgement.

Now Pilate is not a king but rather a governor who acts on behalf of the Emperor of Rome who permits no one to have authority except in his name. Thousands of troops obey Pilate’s commands and Pilate decides the fate of any man or woman he chooses to judge. The Roman Governor answers to no one except for the Emperor. And before this earthly authority, Jesus of Nazareth stands abandoned, condemned, and alone.

*“Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate asks.*

Pilate asks what seems like a straightforward question. Pilate wants to know whether Jesus claims to rule the Jewish people, the troublesome people, the governor oversees in Palestine. He wants to know if a king stands before him or simply an ordinary person. He wants to know what authority Jesus claims for himself in this world.

And let’s make no mistake, the question isn’t simple. It is a dangerous question. Because how Jesus answers will quickly determine the judgement Pilate renders. For Pilate does not and can not tolerate any ruler, any king, who does not bow before the Emperor of Rome. If Jesus claims to be a king, then he will be executed because no one can be allowed to challenge the might of Rome. If Jesus denies he is a king, Pilate will punish him to appease his enemies and let him go as a harmless rabble rouser.

*Jesus answers Pilate’s question of his kingship with a question of his own-  
“Do you ask for yourself or did others tell you about me?”*

Like Jesus does with all the trick questions he’s asked in the gospels, Jesus shifts the discussion. He pushes Pilate to explain why he is asking the question. Does Pilate want to know for himself or is he simply trying to confirm what others have said?

And that is actually an important question. Is Jesus our king or do the words “king, Lord, Christ” flow off our tongues because others are saying them. The answer matters because in the next few weeks, we will start the journey to the stable at Bethlehem.

We will hear the need and the hope that will lead to the birth of Jesus. We will explore the prophecies about the promised child. We will recount the faith of Mary and Joseph and the good news of great joy which the angels sing on the holy night when Jesus arrives on earth. And we will need to ask ourselves. Do we believe Jesus is the king promised by God or is that simply what others claim about him?

Because if we are simply wanting to repeat what others say then the answer of who Jesus is really doesn't matter. Whether someone else thinks that Jesus was or is a king won't make much of an impact on our lives or on our future. But if we are asking for ourselves, if we want to witness for ourselves what God is doing like the shepherds or if we want to seek the meaning of the signs like the wisemen, then the question becomes profound.

Because if we believe that Jesus is the promised king, the messiah, the hope of God, then his words and his actions become life changing for us. How he calls disciples to live will influence our lives. What he teaches through his stories and actions will shape what we believe and do throughout our days. What he offers us through his death and resurrection will bring us new life here and eternal life in the world to come.

*Pilate answers that others have handed Jesus over and are making that claim that he is a king. He wants to know what Jesus has done to provoke being condemned by the religious authorities. And Jesus answers the first question Pilate asks by saying, “my kingdom is not of this world.”*

I know Pilate is thoroughly confused at this point because he asks again “So are you a king?” He wants to know if Jesus claims to be a king. If Jesus considers himself a force in the politics and intrigues of the day. And let's be honest that is also a question we want answered too. We want to know what Jesus asks of us, wants of us, what his call means for us and our world. But the truth is that Jesus has already answered Pilate and us by saying his

rule is not grounded in an earthly kingdom or human authority.

*And Jesus restates that by saying "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."*

For Jesus is a king but is not like other kings. He doesn't come to live in a fancy palace, demands taxes to make himself richer, or use an army to enforce his will. No, while the religious leaders claim Jesus is a king like the other rulers around them, the truth is that the Jesus we proclaim and follow is nothing like earthly rulers.

For unlike the rulers and kings of this world, Jesus does not come to take from us but rather to give to us. To give to us the way to live our lives, to free us from what holds us back, and to reveal to us the truth of God. Jesus comes not to be placed on a throne separate and high above us but to walk among us sharing the light and mercy of God. Jesus comes that we might experience the hope, the peace, the joy, and the love of God in our lives.

Jesus comes to give us strength for our times of trouble. Comfort for our times of sorrow. Wisdom for our times of uncertainty. Jesus comes that we might know God has not forgotten us but is moving in the world to free us and allow us to live as we have never lived before.

Jesus is the incarnation of God, the visible presence of the invisible God, come to change the world and transform the rules of creation itself. His life shows us the meaning and purpose which God intends and wants for each and every one of us. Jesus is King, he is Lord, yet in the same breath we can also call him friend and brother.

For Jesus is the king of kings and the lord of lords who stands abandoned and alone and condemned so that we might never be alone or abandoned or condemned. Jesus dies upon the cross so that we might overcome death. And he rises from the grave to show us the truth of his words and the truth that God's love cannot and will not be denied. Jesus is the king who gives everything so we can share in the kingdom of heaven now and always.