“Not like the world”

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John 18:33-37

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***John 18:33-37***

***33Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” 34Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” 35Pilate 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?” 36Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to 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.” 37Pilate 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.”***

For those who are keeping track, it might seem unusual to read this short portion of Jesus’ trial before Pilate at this time of year. Normally, as this is an event that preceded Jesus’ death, we read this scripture during Lent, before Easter. So why would this text come up today?

“Today marks the last day of the Christian calendar before we start over with Advent. For a while now we have been journeying through the season known as “Ordinary Time” or simply “The Season after Pentecost.” Today, that season comes to an end with a special day called Reign of Christ Sunday or Christ the King Sunday. Our whole journey from Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and everything in between arrives at today’s crowning conclusion. Jesus is King!”

A relative newcomer to the liturgical calendar, this special Sunday was only added to the liturgy as recently as 99 years ago. In 1925, as a reaction to the disarray in Europe after WWI, and the growing secularism and secular ultra-nationalism that was becoming prevalent, the Pope at the time instituted it as a Roman Catholic Rite, hoping to remind everyone that their ultimate loyalty should be to Jesus. Biblical texts like those from today are read on this Sunday because the specifically refer to Jesus as King.

This kind of sounds like it could be a real downer right before Advent and Christmas, to be focusing on a text from Jesus’ trial before his death. On the other hand, we will spend the next four weeks singing many hymns with words like King of Kings! and “Glory to the newborn King.” This might be a perfect time to talk about just what kind of a King we are celebrating.

Describing someone as a king is not the only language of the Church that is confusing or troubling to modern ears. As the Church keeps up with the times, the question is always to we modify what we are doing and saying or do we keep things as tradition has always held? For example, we have just spent six weeks talking about high priests, but you and I don’t have experiences with high priests. I remember asking one of the nuns at the Mercy Center if she thought women would ever be able to become priests. She said that women have always been priests – the issue was with the definition the Church used for a priest. Some people have changed the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer to say “Creator God…” or “Our mother/father God…” As we have become more and more sensitive to rising incidents of child abuse or abusive marriages, we are less and less comfortable with asking women to think of God as Father, especially as they pray. Or even God as He. These are trivial politically correct adjustments to make, for some, but to anyone who has been deeply hurt, just saying “Father” or “He” can bring that deep hurt to the surface. King is one of those words. Many refer to the kingdom of God as the kin-dom of God. Rather than suggesting that people are too sensitive, it’s worth it to take a deeper look at the word King in this case.

When many of us here think of a King, we either think of other countries that have kings now, kings from history, or even kings from fables or fantasy stories. We think of things like empire, top-down authority, golden opulent glory, rulers *over* other people instead of *for* other people. We think of power given to one person without hindrance. It’s an easy jump to think of all kings as malevolent over-lords, dictating rules for others without consideration of everyone. When the Pope instituted this Feast of Christ the King in 1925, the world was rushing to fill the power vacuums around the world. Even so, dictators still happened and WWII still happened. Fascism spread.

If we choose to change the word King to Kin, we lose the opportunity to call out that misuse of the power system that King implies. King implies relationship, and King implies power. Jesus is a new version of both of those things. When we think of a king as someone who rules from afar unfamiliar with the needs of his people, we can confidently say Jesus is not that kind of a king. When we think of a king as someone who surrounds themselves with people loyal only to themselves, we can confidently say that Jesus is not that kind of a king. When we think of a king who makes decisions that only benefit their own wealth and increase of power, we can confidently say that Jesus is not that kind of a king. This is why the nationalism after WWI was so dangerous, and why Christian Nationalism that is so prevalent here in the US now is so dangerous. There is nothing wrong with loving our Christian faith, and there is nothing wrong with loving our nation. But loving one *only with* the other does a disservice to the multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural world that we are a part of. With Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, no longer nation against nation, no favoritism.

As we spend this coming Advent season joyfully singing confidently about Jesus as King, about Israel and Zion, praying Our Father, anticipating the joyful retelling of the birth of our Lord Jesus, we are reminded first that none of these things are like anything we have experienced here in our world. Because Jesus’ kingdom is not from this world. We stand firm in the truth of God’s love for us. We stand eagerly anticipating God’s next new thing.

Amen.

<https://equipper.gci.org/2022/09/sermon-for-november-20-2022-proper-29-reign-of-christ>

<https://www.northminster-indy.org/sermon/christ-the-king-sunday-reflections/#:~:text=Christ%20our%20king%20lived%20not,him%20we%20shall%20not%20want>.