

**Christ the King Sunday SERMON** (John 18:33-37) & (Revelation 1:4b-8)

"Are you the King of the Jews", Pilate questioned Jesus. "My kingdom is not from this world.", Jesus answered.

What makes a king a king in our world? If we think about it, we could come up with a checklist of qualities that one should have to be a king.

To begin with, one should be of a royal lineage....and one would hope a good king would have good leadership skills, fairness, strength, honesty, respect for the law, a sense of justice, honor and goodness. All of these make wonderful qualities for a king or queen to have.

And, if we were to think of various kings and queens, we'd undoubtedly hear of many great things that they have done or do...of work and support given to charitable endeavors...of attention, money and time given to causes that are perhaps near and dear to many people. There is no doubt, that when one holds such a great position of power, the amount of good that can be done from that position can be staggering and truly make an impact. The potential for doing great things is certainly there.

And yet, what can be quite frustrating, is to see those moments in history, when more times than we'd hope, we see that even kings and queens, the highest of authorities, who have been entrusted with vast lands and people over which to rule, can and do fall short of our optimistic list of royal qualities. Certainly, the bible is full of examples of all too human kings who have fallen short of expectations and even leaned towards very bad qualities.

For example, there are good kings, like King David, a well-known and beloved king who won many wars and brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem...but who unfortunately fell short when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband Uriah so that he might marry her. Then, there's his son, King Solomon, famous for his wisdom and whose judgment was often sought from those seeking justice and who even built the famed Temple of Jerusalem...but he also fell short due to the hundreds of wives he married who followed different gods that eventually turned Solomon's heart towards other gods as well. Then we have other kings...like King Ahab, who like Solomon, married a foreigner, Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, whose worship of the foreign god Baal lead her to threaten to kill God's Prophet Elijah and convince King Ahab to give the Baal cult official status in the capital...And, as we'll be hearing the Nativity

Story during advent, we will revisit the story of the very bad King Herod, who in order to stop Jesus, the new King of the Jews from being born, massacred all the baby boys who were two years and younger in the land.

To be a king or a queen in our world certainly does not mean that they will be perfect rulers...it doesn't even mean that they will be good or mediocre rulers...often, to be a king or queen in our world, or someone who wields a great amount of power over others, is a test of great proportions...because with that position, with that power, comes an enormous amount of responsibility.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. And, as we heard our scripture reading for today, where Pilot is questioning Jesus who has been handed over to him, if he is the King of the Jews...and Jesus replied "my kingdom is not of this world", I have to say I am relieved that Jesus' kingdom is not bound to the many downfalls of this world. Jesus does not deny being a king, only to being a king in our world...if Jesus were like an earthly king, he would likely fight for land, money, gain, power and build great armies like other kings. If Jesus were like an earthly king being held and questioned by Pilot, no doubt he would have sent an army to free him...he even said it himself when he said, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If it did, my servants would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jewish leaders. No, my kingdom is not an earthly one."

If Jesus were like an earthly king, he might have become furious with all those who turned him over to Pilot and might have ordered the incarceration of those who betrayed him. If Jesus were like an earthly king, and knew that the end result of his questioning would lead to his death, what would stop him from ensuring that all who sought his death would receive their end as well? These are the all too human responses we might expect from an earthly king.

It is interesting to note, that there were numerous times when people tried to push Jesus into becoming an earthly king, but he simply refused to be forced into that box. From his birth, he was descended from the royal lineage of David...prophesies heralded his coming and much was expected of him. Satan tried to tempt him with the kingdoms of the world in the desert, if he would only worship him...but Jesus refused. After people saw him perform the miracle where he fed more than 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish, they planned to get Jesus and make him their king, but he left to the hills alone before they could come get him.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, even riding on the most humble of animals...a donkey, they still cried out "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!" John 12:13b

Try as they might, people could not make Jesus their earthly king...and I understand the desire to see a golden crown placed on the head of Jesus, a man that inspired, that impressed, that was long awaited, that performed miracles, that had a direct connection to God and caused people to follow him wherever he went...I understand the hope people must have entertained that if only they could make him their earthly king, he could change their earthly lives for the better...but, the thing is, they didn't understand that Jesus was meant to do more for this world with his impending sacrifice than anything he could ever do within the limits of an earthly crown. They couldn't see the full picture...they couldn't see past their own needs and wants...whereas the highest honor within their narrow perspective ended with a band of gold to be placed on Jesus head, God's plan was to burst open that perspective, replacing that earthly crown with a holy halo fashioned by God's own hand, Christ's sacrifice and the salvation of the world.

Jesus refused the power and riches of an earthly kingdom, for God's royal mantle of humility, suffering and death. Christ's path was never meant to be easy...and refusing the easy path of an earthly kingdom, while accepting the hard and painful path that would lead Jesus to his Heavenly throne was how Jesus lived up to his great responsibility as our Heavenly King. Whereas in our human histories and ideas of how a king comes to power, it is often the king's subjects who end up suffering, even dying to see their king on the throne, while in God's Kingdom and how Jesus became our Heavenly King, it was Jesus who suffered and died so that the gates of God's kingdom would be open to us by his grace and his sacrifice, undeserving as we are.

My Kingdom is not from this world, Jesus said. "'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." says the book of Revelations (1:8).

Jesus, our Heavenly King, is above and beyond the human pitfalls of kingship. And, it is fitting that next Sunday is the 1st Sunday of Advent, where we anticipate the coming of Christ, because today, Christ the King Sunday, is meant to announce to the world that Jesus is like no other king...he is not fettered or tied by human temptations or fears, but overcomes them...in the hands of Pilot, Jesus does not back down or try to save himself, or try to get himself freed from his situation...he knows who he is, he knows what he

must do, he knows that his impending death, that would save the world from sin, was decided even before he was born...that the beginning of his story and our salvation commences at start of Advent.

Perhaps, one of the greatest differences between our Heavenly King and earthly kings, is that while many earthly kings use their influence to command people and make them do their will, Jesus...our Heavenly King, does not force us to do anything...in fact, we were given free will from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden...and Jesus' sacrifice ensured God's forgiveness of us, even when we do not deserve it.

An earthly king would use their influence to have power over people...but our Heavenly King has given the power back to us...God has given us the choice to decide how we use the power, whether great or small, that we hold in this world. While we may not hold a royal scepter in our hands, God has placed in our hands the power to choose what kind of people we want to be in this world. And I tell you...I hope you choose well...because as we hear the daily news of what is happening from afar, beside us and even within our own gates, too many people have chosen to bring darkness, hatred and fear into our world...but you are the ones who have the power to shine the light of God's undying love wherever you go throughout your lives. St. Francis of Assisi once said "All the darkness in the world can't extinguish the light from a single candle"...and I see in you, many candles before me that can make a huge difference and dispel the darkness in our world.

God has placed in your hands the power to change the world by the choices that you make, fueled by God's love and Jesus' teachings. It may seem like too great a power to hold within your hands and perhaps too great a task, but God never gives us anything that we cannot handle, with Jesus' help or with the help of our fellow Christians. There are a couple of beautiful sentiments I'd like to share that have generally been attributed to Mother Teresa, about the power we hold in the things we do...the first is "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love"...and the second is, "I alone can't change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples". Whether we choose to affect change in big or small ways, the key is to do the things we do with God's love in our hearts...always let God's love take the lead, when you listen, when you speak, when you act...let the love, that we await in Advent and which was born long ago in a manger, fill your hearts...for no darkness in this world, no matter how deep, will ever extinguish the blinding light from our Heavenly King.

AMEN.

## Prayers of Intercession - Christ the King Sunday

Heavenly King...

No one knows us better than you do...you know us better than we know ourselves...you know exactly what the problems in our world are...you know our thoughts, our dreams, our hopes...and you know how much we need you.

Lord, you are the breath in our lungs, the strength in our arms, the intelligence in our minds and the love in our hearts...we are your people and you are our King!

Thank you for your guidance even when we do not notice it...for your presence when we may think we are alone...for your strength that always keeps us going...for your peace that helps us rest...for your love without which we would be lost...

Hear the prayers, Father, that are deep in our hearts...our hearts are crying for the victims of all the terrorist attacks that have taken place in the world...our hearts bleed for the families who are grieving for their loved ones...Our hearts feel the pain of your suffering people Lord...Father, be with all who are suffering, confused and scared by these attacks...bring comfort in these dark times...and help those in power, Lord, to make wise decisions and find solutions that will see an end to all the senseless killing.

We also pray today for our sister congregation in Brussels who have cancelled their services today due to the scare of attacks. We pray for their safety and the safety of all.

And, Lord, we continue to pray for all the refugees that have been displaced from their home...we pray especially for the families that have been torn apart...for the children who no longer have their mother, father, sister or brother...who are lost in the waves of so many other people who have been torn from their homes...Father, they need you...hold them in your loving and protective hands...bring them comfort and aid, and help us all to be sensitive to their plight and act with love when given the opportunity.

Jesus, our King, we raise our open arms to you...you are our majesty...you are the light in the darkness...Our Shepherd...the one who comes in the name of the Lord...the Alpha and the Omega...you are our Salvation...our everything...

Jesus, help us to always seek you...to look to you in all that we do...and follow your teachings...thank you for placing us on the path that leads to your kingdom...help us not to stray from it...help us not to take for granted the sacrifice you made for us... For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. May these words always burn bright in our hearts and minds.

We are eternally grateful for your love...and for the power you have given us to choose the kinds of lives we want to live...guide us, God, and help us live our lives in ways that honor you, that honor your love and your sacrifice. And, continually remind us to always act with love in our hearts...may your love be what drives us as Christians...and may that love always triumph over the evil in this world.

In your most holy name we pray...Amen.