

2 Samuel 12: 1-7; Joh 18: 33-37. Questions and Answer

Now these are the last words of David:
 The oracle of David, son of Jesse,
 the oracle of the man whom God exalted,^[a]
 the anointed of the God of Jacob,
 the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

²The spirit of the LORD speaks through me;
 his word is upon my tongue.
³The God of Israel has spoken;
 the Rock of Israel has said to me:
 “One who rules over people justly,
 ruling in the fear of God,
⁴is like the light of morning,
 like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
 gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.”
⁵Is not my house like this with God?
 For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
 ordered in all things and secure.
 Will he not cause to prosper
 all my help and my desire?
⁶But the godless^[b] are all like thorns that are thrown away,
 for they cannot be picked up with the hand;
⁷to touch them one uses an iron bar
 or the shaft of a spear.
 And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.^[c]

As he is about to leave his life on earth, David, the beloved King of Israel, is filled with the Spirit of God. David sings of his closeness to God as God’s favorite, chosen and anointed. He has received God’s Spirit and the spirit makes him declare what God requires in a king: “One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning.” But these words accuse him at the same time, for David *also* knows that, as a king, he had not always ruled justly; there were times he failed God and his People, too. David knows, he has not always been what God anointed him to be. Yet, at the end of his life, David leans into God’s promise: “Is not my house like this WITH GOD? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.” The ground of hope for this dying King for the future of his people, is the everlasting Covenant God has made with him and how secure that covenant is, because God is the one holding it up. His hope rests in the faithfulness of God who holds the future. People of faith, this is our God, who will hold up God’s end of the covenant even when we fail on our end.

On this last day of the church year, hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, of how God continues to hold us and our future in the Truth of God's faithfulness and love. Hear now the Gospel.

John 18:33-37³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate 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?" ³⁶ Jesus 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." ³⁷ Pilate 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."

So, where is Jesus and why is Jesus here? Right before this passage, the authorities had handed Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman ruler of their region. They were making a political gesture to Rome. The chief priests had figured that an internal Jewish way of handling the situation Jesus was creating would not be enough to secure their own standing with Rome who had power over them. The most politically expedient thing was to have Jesus killed, by Rome, according to the Roman execution method of crucifixion. In this way, they get rid of Jesus who was challenging their authority and upsetting their religious system, *and* they can reinforce their standing with Rome by appearing to obey and collaborate with Rome for the sake of Roman peace, Pax Romana.

As the episode opens, Jesus has already been bound and beaten. Pilate's job was to keep foreign subjects, like the Jews, under control so as to maintain the peace and security in the Roman empire. His concern is purely political: is Jesus a threat to the Roman empire?

My apologies if this sounds like it's all about politics, but Jesus lived in a real world like ours and got caught up in political power games, and the politics of his time was the politics of fear and violence. Rome governed by fear, and whoever governs by fear is the Rome of today. And so, the Jewish authorities handed Jesus over to Pilate, in order to have him be condemned to death by crucifixion.

With that political concern in mind, Pilate asks Jesus questions, beginning with "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus is standing before Pilate and is supposedly on trial, but Jesus responds to Pilate with a question of his own. "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" This question from Jesus turns Pilate's attention inward, inviting him to consider "Do *you* want to know who I am?"

Pilate's answer is why should he care? "I am not a Jew, am I?" He doesn't care who Jesus is in the Jewish community which he despises anyway, so long as he's not a king who poses threat to Caesar. So, he narrows the focus of his question: "What have you done, to upset your own nation and the chief priests?"

But instead of explaining what he had done to upset the religious leaders of his own nation, Jesus loops back to Pilate's response "I am not a Jew, am I?" He then tells them 3 things. First, he tells Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world; Jesus is not talking about location of his kingdom but of its origin. His kingship, his reign, does not originate from this world but from God, whose rules and reigns in love and who is love. That's the truth, and he came into the world to testify to the truth, that's the second thing. And the third, persons of truth hear and obey Jesus's voice.

So, Pilate, it doesn't matter if you are Jew or Roman. If you want to know this King and belong, you can. You need not be a Jew, nor being a Roman ruler disqualifies you from belonging to his kingdom; just hear the truth of the fullness of God in my voice. Then you'll find yourself living in the reign of Love and belong to Christ.

Now, it is Pilate who stand in judgment; he can belong to this King of Love, but he would be completely transformed. Pilate continued, "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." But Pilate still understands the kingship only in a political sense. Jesus does not understand kingship in the same way that Pilate does. They are not on the same wavelength. Remember, when Jesus was working miracles and doing mighty acts, people tried to make him their earthly, but Jesus escaped them.

Jesus would not be turned into something he was not anointed to be. The Kingdom Jesus is inviting Pilate to enter is not a political one, but the reign of God of Love, who rules by Love, no matter where its citizens made their home here on earth.

In this passage, it was Jesus who was brought to stand in judgment before Pilate who asks question. But it is Pilate who really is on trial. As Jesus tells him who he is, Jesus is offering Pilate a moment of decision to belong to his kingdom. Yet, Pilate can understand kingship only on a political term and fail to "hear" Jesus' voice. Jesus was opening a door even for Pilate, an oppressor of his own Jewish people, but Pilate cannot hear Jesus' voice shepherding him into his fold; he is entrenched in another kingdom, the Empire of Rome. We don't live in a literal

empire; we may not think we have a tyrannical ruler in our lives, but we do let so many things “rule” and “reign over” our hearts and minds. What rules your hearts and minds in all the aspects of your life?

Jesus came into our world to save us from the tyranny of many things, including the real, political tyranny, by showing the truth: God loves us, and we are to love God, which we cannot do without loving our neighbors as the extension of ourselves. Our world is political in that our world is full of forces that demand our allegiance. As we try to follow Jesus and his way of Love, we inevitably bump up against and the force that want to lead us astray. Jesus knows that. Like King David, we can lean into God’s promise. God holds us up when we fail. As we live the truth found in Christ, it sets us free to discover God’s will in a future that is open to possibilities for transformation of our sinful world into the world where Love reigns.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. I mentioned in my pre-Sunday email, that the Pope back in 1925 instituted the Christ the King Sunday as a reminder to Christians that their allegiance was to the spiritual ruler of the kingdom of heaven, for their world was being swept up in a fervor for the dictatorship of Mussolini who ruled by violence and threat. But that’s only a half of the story of the Christ the King. That same Pope, only less than 10 years later, came to an agreement for the church with the Nazis and opened the political door to Hitler. The Protestant Church in the Germany followed suit.

A Church that ceases to be the living body of Christ and turns into a mere a human religious institution concerned with power, together with the Power-that-be of the world, whether it is a republic or a monarch, would toss the name of Jesus to and fro to lead people astray, just as these Jewish religious authorities did with Pilate, tossing Jesus to and fro to secure their status with the Roman government who held power over them.

Jesus is the King after God’s own heart who does rule his people justly. A question is asked of us. Are we his people? Do we hear *his* voice? Are we straining to discern his voice in the midst of false prophets claiming, “I am he!” Can we hear his voice AND follow him when forces in the world are pushing and pulling to make us go astray. Who is your Lord and Savior? Let us not be led astray. Pray that we remember that our Kingdom is not of this world but of Christ our King, and our church his living body in the world, standing on the side of Love, belonging in the truth. May it be so.