

November 21, 2010 – Reign of Christ

John 18:33-37

33 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 is not from this world. If my kingdom were from 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.’

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Today is a Feast Day.

We celebrate the Reign of Christ.

The feast of "The Reign of Christ" may not be familiar to you. Some call it 'Christ the King' Sunday.

This feast is the invention of the 20th-century pope, Pope Pius XI. In 1925, Pope Pius felt concerned. Europe was still reeling from the effects of World War I. In response to the world's worrying direction, the Pope called for a Sunday feast day to assert the "Kingship of our Saviour". He called for a day on which people would honour Christ in expectation of the day when *every* one in heaven and earth would confess Jesus as Lord.

Now in Canada, we decided to change the name from the feast of "Christ the King" to "The Reign of Christ". "Christ the King" seemed to suggest Jesus as Imperial Ruler, inviting Christians to imperial rule over others. The reign of Jesus Christ is the reign of love; love of God and love of one another.

When Jesus is before Pilate, he represents a different power and rule, that is the power of love and the rule of God...a power which refuses to crush, or kill the opposition.

Pilate did not recognize the type of King Jesus is. So he did not remove Jesus from the false accusations against him.

Jesus said he was born for truth telling. Truth is a very big idea. Truth includes both that God is love *and* that Jesus died for our sins. Truth includes the Creeds' statements of faith *and* the inner testimony of the Spirit. Jesus is stating very clearly, that more than he wants to be seen as a worldly king, he wants the world to know he is the living embodiment of what is true.

Here is what Christian author Chelsey Harmon wrote:

It is our human predicament to tell the story as though it is about us. Even focusing on our sinfulness and need for a Saviour, is... true, we can miss hearing and knowing the bigger truth. ... The sacrifice of God for us is not *only* about us and our need, but *even more truly*, about our loving God who made and sustains the world and everything in it. It is just one piece of his testimony about who God is—which is the truest truth there is.

Maybe as he was being led away, Jesus turned back to look at Pilate in all his power and status. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus looked at Pilate and loved him in his **tragedy**, that he had stood before **'the'** king of truth bearing and hadn't realized it; that he had missed the opportunity of a life-time, to save that different king, to even welcome him instead of destroy him.

I want to tell you a little story.

Once upon a time, in a tiny church in a tiny village in the north of Europe, as the parishioners gathered for Sunday worship, an elderly man was seen among them. He looked quite distinguished, and well groomed. But in this tiny place, he was a stranger.

He was no stranger to church worship, however. He made his way into the warm darkness of the church, and went to an empty pew for a few moments of quiet before the service. He removed his gloves, and set them inside the hat, placed his elegant silver-topped cane carefully next to them, and gave himself over to the musings of his heart.

Then she arrived. We all have met her in one form or another. The matriarchal figure of a woman in charge of the world - or at least, in charge of **her** world. Hatted and gloved, befurred and befeathered, she did not walk, she made stately progress through the courtyard into the church.

There, in the soft radiance of the candles, was the man - the visitor - the stranger. With the air of one born to privilege, she managed to break the reverie of the stranger.

"You, sir, are in MY pew."

The old gentleman, surprised by the interruption, looked up into the face of the woman. Wordlessly, but with a twinkle in his eye, he collected his belongings. He stood, bowed slightly in courtesy and apology, and moved to another pew, leaving the queenly matron in her domain.

At the conclusion of the service, the gentleman stepped into the grey light of the cloudy day. He made his way towards the gate of the courtyard. He paused and caught the eye of the woman who had rebuffed him. With the same twinkle, he tipped his expensive hat to her, and made his way down the street and vanished around a corner.

The week following, the matron was expressing her strong opinions on a subject, when she was interrupted by another lady "of a certain age".

"Did you see who was in church last Sunday?"

The Matron answered

"Everyone who ought to have been there, of course - oh, and some strange man."
 "That was no strange man..." - the other lady spoke up - "...that was King Christian of Denmark." - at which The Matron's face turned a ghastly shade of purple.

She had thrown **the king** out of her church pew; the head of one of the oldest European monarchies. Had he visited her home, she would have lavished her finest linens and most refined manners on him.

Where does the king come, unexpectedly and unidentified, to you and to me?

I hope you realize that this story is not meant to scold people for sitting in the same pew each week. We do it because we are creatures of habit not because we feel we own them.

The purpose of the story is to remind us to be on the look out for our king; for our king is easily missed. He does not come in fine robes or even expensive designer suits. Our king comes to serve rather than to be served and calls us to do the same. He said that when we give a cup of water to one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we give it to him. He said that when we receive a child, we receive the kingdom of God.

How **does** Christ come to us?

Do we, like Pilate, and the church matron, face unexpected opportunities of a life-time to receive Christ? Maybe more often than we think? Giving a brown bag meal and a cup of coffee to a marginalized person, even smiling at such a person is an encounter with the Christ. Becoming parents and grandparents, and receiving the gift of a child is a life-time opportunity to receive Christ. Teachers, and those of you who care for an infirm relative or friend meet Christ in these activities. These are opportunities that require far more from us than giving up our pew in church. And yet, it is in these encounters, as we adjust our lives to the needs of another, that the reign of Christ, the reign of love comes to life.

Christ is in each of us...and so we greet Christ in each person we meet. St. Alphonus Rodriguez was the porter, or doorkeeper, at the Jesuits' college on the island of Majorca. He became a favorite there as he tried to see God in everyone. Every time there was a knock at his door he would answer, "I'm coming, Lord."

This feast the Reign of Christ is an opportunity for each of us to sign on once again... for a new way of life and a new way of living right now. Jesus does not force himself upon anyone, but he offers himself to all who come to him. Knowing Jesus is king is one thing, but committing ourselves to him every day is another.

Before we enter the expectant season of Advent, today we think of the king who asks of us not quivering fright, but union of hearts. Rather than servitude, this king demands love and the earnest desire to be with him, no matter what.

So it was that C. S. Lewis wrote in his fantasy the Tales of Narnia
“the word is out that the King may land.

Let us be ready to welcome the king with hospitality when he lands. Amen.

Jesus offers it anyway. He says he was born for truth telling. He says the reason he came into the world was to testify to the truth. Truth is the hallmark of not only God's Kingdom, but Christ's reign as King. It is how he chooses to describe it—perhaps making it its most important characteristic.

If I were to ask you or the members of your church, "What is the most important thing about the Kingdom of God?" How many of us would answer with something about ourselves? Many of us would quickly rattle off the no-brainer: "That Jesus died for my sins." Some of us might take a moment and consider answering with something equally true, but which feels a little riskier because of its broad openness to interpretation, saying something like: "God is love."

Even truer than the fact that Jesus does what he does because of what it will do for us (the work of atonement), Jesus does what he does because of who the Trinity is. The essential nature of the Godhead is to be purely loving, perfect and holy. To join in the reign of God and the Jesus Kingdom is to always place the character of God at the center of what we witness to, and how we witness it. We are not people who need the same tactics as the kingdoms of this world. We reject fear tactics, brute force and manipulations for control. We are people who rest on the truth of God; who listen for his voice and wisdom as we witness. Instead of focusing on what might result *first*, the way of truth is to consider the source, which is God, and seek to tell the truth about God in how we live.

This is a witnessing life that tells the true story of the larger narrative arc of Scripture. God created the world while knowing what the possibilities and consequences would be. He knew what he was making possible—both good and bad. God did it, not because of those consequences, but because of who God is: a loving creator who cannot help but

Here is another interesting tidbit.

The new young king of Jordan has an annoying [to his subjects] habit of disguising himself as a beggar or working class nobody, and sneaking into government offices, hospitals and other facilities to observe for himself exactly how his lowliest people are being treated by the people mandated by the King to care for them. The king then rights the wrongs he observes – an interesting way to reign.....much as I imagine Christ reigns among us today.