



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church  
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November 22, 2009

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Endtime: Christ the King

John 18:33-37

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Daniel 7:13, 14

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 45

Second Lesson: Revelation 1:4b-8

Gospel: John 18:33-37

**Are You the King of the Jews?**

Eyes give a deceptive answer  
The Truth gives an unchanging answer

Stand side by side with Pilate for a moment. What do you see in front of you? This man you've heard so much about, this man that so many people have such strong feelings about and are going to any lengths to see him dead, and you know it; what do you see in front of you? Here's a guy who hasn't slept in a long time. He probably looks pretty frazzled. You wonder if before they brought him to Pilate they wiped the spittle off his face from when the guards of the chief priests were spitting on him. You wonder how dark some of the bruises already had become after they had beaten him, the chief priests, and then later the Roman soldiers before they brought him to Pilate. All in all, if your eyes are gazing upon Jesus standing before Pilate in the time that John 18 is describing, you are not seeing a very impressive picture, are you?

Think back to a few years ago. Do you remember the pictures that were all over all the news broadcasts of Saddam Hussein after he was captured? Do you remember what he looked like in those pictures? He didn't really look much like a dictator that was full of glory anymore, did he? Are you beginning to get an idea of what Jesus looked like as Pilate was looking at him?

There's no doubt that when he asks the question, he doesn't believe it. "Are you the king of the Jews?" This guy doesn't look like a king. He doesn't look glorious in majesty. He doesn't look royal and regal and splendid. He looks like a beaten guy that some people are just not that happy with. But those are the charges – claiming to be a king in the place of Caesar. Pilate had seen Caesar. Caesar looked nothing like Jesus looked in front of him.

So he asked the question, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate's eyes had to be screaming an answer into his brain. "Of course this guy isn't a king. This guy is nothing close to a king. He might have some followers; he might be some religious nut job of these backwater Judean religious fanatics, but king? Not hardly."

So today we consider, on Christ the King Sunday, how Jesus is a king unlike any king on the basis of how he answered that question; "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus reaches out to Pilate and tries to say "Don't listen to what your eyes are telling you,

listen to what my voice is telling you. Listen to what is truth.” But even that Pilate doesn’t seem to get a grasp on.

So the question then becomes, what do our eyes at times tell us? What does the truth tell us today? Has the truth changed over the last 2,000 years?

Pilate had really had enough by this point in time of the Jewish leaders. He was sick of them. He wanted nothing to do with them. He had just gotten himself into some trouble because he had put down one of their rebellions and one of the things they were doing a little bit too harshly. Then they went to Caesar. So he was in trouble with Caesar. He has to address this head on so that they don’t go around him to Caesar again. You get the feeling, as you are reading the Gospels, that Pilate was just sick of it all. This idea that Jesus would be a king just looks ridiculous to him. Then he gives such cryptic answers. “Are you the king of the Jews?” “My kingdom is not of this world.” What other world is there? Isn’t that what your eyes would be screaming at you? Where else do you want to be king; Pluto? It’s not even a planet anymore. Where are you going to be king? It just doesn’t make any sense to him.

But Jesus is reaching out to him and trying to tell him that he is talking about a different kind of kingdom and being a different kind of king. It’s a king that centers in something other than this world. He says, “If my kingdom was of this world, I wouldn’t have stuck the ear back on the servant of the high priest that Peter cut off.” Maybe Pilate had heard of that, how one of his people grabbed a sword and cut off a guy’s ear. A real good fisherman; all he managed to catch was an ear as he swung a sword at someone’s head. Even if these guys were going to fight to defend and make Jesus king by force, they weren’t really a big threat; a bunch of fisherman with swords.

Jesus says, “My kingdom isn’t of this world. I don’t come with that kind of power. I don’t come with that kind of might. My kingdom is not of this world. If it were of this world, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest. My kingdom is from another place.” He’s really trying to get Pilate to look at things and hear that this is about matters that go much deeper and much broader than just what can be seen; the things that can’t be seen, the things that are of the spiritual world, the things that are of our eternal salvation and our eternal home, things that can’t be seen. But because they couldn’t be seen, Pilate had no use for them. He relied on what his eyes saw and his eyes told him “This guy is no threat to Caesar. This guy is no threat to me. This guy is no threat to anyone as far as being a king. Yet, let’s just go kill him anyhow because I don’t want to deal with all these troublemakers.” His eyes told him it just wasn’t worth the bother. And he was wrong. Jesus reached out to him, and he didn’t hear. He didn’t have ears to hear. He didn’t have eyes to see.

You and I would say we’d never stand shoulder to shoulder with Pilate and say that Jesus isn’t a king. We call him King of kings and Lord of lords. We’ve sung that over and over already this morning. We believe he is our Lord and Savior. Every time we say “Christ the Lord” or “Jesus our Lord,” we are talking about Jesus our King, Jesus

our Ruler. We would never say that he isn't a king. Or would we? It's interesting how often we have to remind ourselves that Jesus remains a king.

Last week we handed out a booklet. I asked anyone and everyone in the congregation to write what they would love to see God do among us. God says he can do more than we can ask for or imagine, so I asked people to try to out-imagine God. The purpose for this is to remind ourselves that God remains God even when our eyes are fixed on things that might lead us to question whether God is still ruling in his heavens.

Breaking down barriers is what we've been talking about, right? As we look at these barriers, sometimes our eyes get so fixed on the barriers that we forget that God is God. We become so wound up in whatever barrier we think we can't surmount and we begin to wonder if God really rules in his heavens. So the point of this booklet was to get us to see that God remains God and he is still King who rules over all things. And if he chooses and if he sees fit in his grace, he could absolutely do immeasurably more than we could ask for or imagine. We need that reminder because otherwise we get too sunk in our comfortable ruts of doing the same thing at the same time without even knowing why anymore. We just know what and why doesn't matter and we don't want to be bothered with whys. We just want to know what we are supposed to do, and that becomes another barrier we have to get over.

So that booklet was written and handed out last week. If you didn't get a copy, get one and sit down and read it. You and I might not agree on everyone's vision as the absolute best vision for our church, but that's not the point. The point is to remember that God is still God and that if he chooses and sees fit, he would do it. You and I will spend more and more of our time talking about what we can't do or what can't be done. Every time you and I say, "It can't be done" or "We can't do it," aren't we standing side by side with Pilate and saying, "Jesus is not King. He does not rule over the universe for the benefit of the church. And he will not see to it that we can break down these barriers and continue to serve him and share his Gospel with others."

It's interesting; I had the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders this last week evaluate this booklet. I wanted them to read it for me and evaluate it. For the most part, they all put some thought into it, and I was kind of impressed. But one thing they kept coming back to again and again was that we shouldn't do this or shouldn't do that until the debt is paid off. That's taking us back to barrier thinking again, isn't it? Instead of saying, "God is King and God can do anything he wants," we get fixed on what we can't do because we are sinners and because we fall short.

When we do that, when we focus on the "cannot" and "never happens" and "won't be done" and "shouldn't be done" and everything else under the sun, we forget that Jesus is King. We rely on what our eyes can see. We don't look around, past or through the barriers. We are stuck focusing on the barrier. I will guarantee you that when we are focused on barriers; we are not sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world that is perishing. Sometimes these barriers become walls that keep us from realizing what we are here for. What we are here for is not just to tickle ourselves and amuse ourselves.

We are here to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world that is dying, a world that is perishing. Just like Christ reached out to Pilate. It doesn't matter if people listen to us or not or if they respond favorably or not. That's not the point. The point is we need to glorify and honor God by doing what he has called us to do and then simply trust that he is King in heaven. And if he sees fit, he will bless our efforts.

Here's the truth. Jesus is King. That doesn't change. Anyone on the side of the truth, the absolute truth, knows that Jesus Christ is the only way, the only truth, and the only life. He's not one path of many as our world wants to say. He is not one choice that's okay for us but don't force it on anyone else. He is the only choice. We talked about it this morning in Bible Class.

Coexist – have you seen those bumper stickers? “Coexist” with all the different religious symbols. Coexist – there will be a time when all of them except one will coexist. It will be hell. All the ones that don't believe that Jesus is their Savior, they'll all be in hell, and they'll be coexisting. It will not be a peaceful coexistence. It will be a painful coexistence. If we are going to buy into Satan's lie that we should just coexist and not talk about Jesus, then God save us because we are putting our own faith at risk and Satan has put a crack into God's armor. The truth is Jesus is the only way. He is an absolute truth that is unchanging.

Here is the absolute truth about Jesus. He lived and died for every time that you and I worry and fret and forget that Jesus is King. He died for every time that you and I look to ourselves as the answer to overcoming these barriers instead of looking to God. He is the one who died and lived perfectly in our place so that the barrier of our sin that separates us from God has been broken down, all these sins that we continue to commit as we focus on all of these barriers that we have erected.

His love for us is that amazing. It's that patient. It's that unchanging. Honestly at times I can't understand it or believe it because I know how impatient I am. I know how I want things to be done now and done the right way and done God's way. I know how impatient I can become when so many other things distract us from what God has called us to do.

Here's another truth. God chooses to work through imperfect people like you and like me. People that are filled with flaws, people that are filled with things that are barriers that keep us from serving him perfectly. He could have given the task to the angels who serve him faithfully and who don't get tired and who don't make excuses. Instead he gave it to us and he said to us, “You go and be my voice that speaks the Gospel. You go and be my hand that helps those that are needy. You go and be my arms that embrace those that are hurting. You be Christ to the world for me.” He gives us that privilege even though he knows we are going to screw it up more often than not. Then, when we do screw it up he says, “That's alright. I lived and died in your place. I forgive you because my Spirit lives in your heart.”

That's the kind of love that our God has for us. That's the kind of privilege that he has given us. That's the truth that is unchanging and unending. He puts on us the responsibility to use the blessings he has given us, the responsibility to go forward and step forward in faith to serve God with all of the might that he gives, relying on his Word, relying on his Sacraments, not relying on ourselves any longer, but moving forward in faith to serve.

“Are you the king of the Jews?” You better believe it. And by God's grace, you get to live it.