

## Reign of Christ Sunday

Today is Reign of Christ, or Christ the King Sunday in the liturgical calendar. It's been a celebration on the Church calendar since 1925. It marks the end of the Church year, while Advent next week begins the new Church year. And so, it gives us an opportunity to look in both directions – backwards and forwards – to reflect on things of the previous year, while looking ahead with anticipation on how Christ is coming anew into our lives in the new year.

It gives us the opportunity to truly question, what type of reign does Christ have? How do we view Jesus as Ruler? I hope we recognize He behaves very differently than the ways in which our human rulers act. In listening to some people talk, I suspect they would very much like to have Jesus come sweeping down from Heaven waving American flags, speaking in our Midwestern English dialect, and calling on the whole world to “Make America Great Again.”

But that's not how Jesus operates in Scripture, and we shouldn't expect Him to behave contrary to the pattern He's already demonstrated in Scripture to us. Jesus Christ, His life, His teachings, His treatment of people – ought to be the gold standard by which human leaders govern and rule. Jesus Christ should be the exemplar of leadership we look to individually as Christians, but also corporately as a nation and as members of a global community. With all this in mind, we're going to look at a passage from the Gospel of John. If you have your Bibles or Bible apps handy, turn with me to John 18:33-37. **Read John 18:33-37.**

## A Reign of Truth

Today we stand at the intersection of the present and the future – where we acknowledge Christ's eternal kingship over all creation – but not yet completely operating the way it ought to here below. Christ is not only King of our hearts, but also Ruler of the universe. He's not a political figure like our earthly rulers, but rather, He's a divine King whose authority is rooted in truth and glory. In the Gospel lesson we hear Jesus speak of His kingship before Pilate. In Daniel, we are given a vision of a heavenly throne room where the authority of the Son of Man is proclaimed.

These two passages taken together help us understand the depth and significance of Christ's reign. It is a reign of truth, a reign that goes far beyond earthly politics, and it's a reign of glory that will last forever. Our Gospel passage this morning is a snippet of the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion on Good Friday. Jesus has already been betrayed, arrested, and handed over to Pilate to be put on trial.

Pilate was the Roman governor. He understood earthly politics very well. He had a mindset which went well with the people of that day along the lines of, “If you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” So, he did pretty much anything the Jewish religious elite wanted him to do, and in exchange they kept the Jewish people relatively calm and obedient to Rome.

### **Pilate Gets Politics**

“Pilate went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’” (John 18:33). Pilate’s question is more than a casual inquiry. It’s a question rooted in political suspicion and fear. The Roman Empire ruled over the land of Judea. Kings in Judea were approved by Rome.

That’s how the Empire governed various lands so well. If they could get royal families to collaborate with them, then the native rulers had nothing to worry about. But if a native ruler decided he – or she (there’s at least one case in history of that, namely Cleopatra in Egypt) – wasn’t going to take orders from Rome anymore, the Empire rolled in and took things over directly. So, here’s Jesus before Pilate, and the Jewish leadership have brought Him before Pilate on the charge of claiming to be a king – in other words, a king not sanctioned by Rome, and a challenge to Caesar’s authority in this part of the world.

Pilate, like the political leaders of his day, and of this day, was concerned with the question of power and authority. However, Jesus doesn’t answer Pilate’s question in the way that fits the Roman governor’s understanding of kingship. First of all, Pilate expects the Man Jesus to answer questions he asks directly. Instead, Pilate gets this response from Jesus: “Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about Me?” (verse 34).

### **Not the Answer Pilate Expects**

It’s not the answer Pilate expects. You can tell he’s somewhat taken aback by it. “Am I a Jew? Your own people and chief priests handed You over to me. What is it You have done?” (verse 35) Pilate replies. He’s trying to get to the root of what Jesus has done that’s so off-putting to the religious elite.

Pilate’s question assumes a political framework, but Jesus clarifies that His kingship is not of this world. “Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world,’” (verse 36a). This statement is very telling. It reveals the radical nature of Jesus’ reign. Unlike earthly rulers who seek power through military might, political manipulation, or economic control. Jesus’ kingdom is established through truth, justice, and sacrificial love. His reign is not confined to any geographical or political boundaries. It’s spiritual and eternal.

Jesus further elaborates on this. He says, “If it were [of this world], My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from another place,” (verse 36b). If Jesus’ kingdom were of this world, His followers would fight to the death to prevent His arrest. Since His kingdom isn’t of this world, there’s no need for violence. His reign isn’t about the use of force or the accumulation of earthly wealth and power. His kingship is about truth – truth that stands in stark contrast to the lies, falsehoods, and manipulations of earthly rulers.

### **To Testify to the Truth**

Pilate seems to grasp some of it. He responds, “You are a king, then!” (verse 37a). But Jesus has to further explain it in more detail to him. “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me,” (verse 37b). Jesus’ declaration points to the ultimate nature of His reign.

Jesus is not only a king – but also the embodiment of Truth itself. His kingdom is a kingdom of truth, rooted in the unchanging character of God. The truth Jesus speaks of is one which transcends human power structures and invites us into a relationship with God based on honesty, integrity, and righteousness. There is an Absolute Truth in the universe, and that’s Jesus Christ, revealed through the Scriptures.

I sometimes hear people say, “This is her truth, that’s his truth,” and so on. What they’re getting at is that different people have different perspectives – not different truths. There’s only one Absolute Truth – and that’s Jesus Christ revealed to us in the Scriptures. Everyone who listens to – and lives by – His teachings are on Jesus’ side. His kingdom is founded on a truth that’s not subjective or relative. It’s founded on the unchanging nature of God.

### **Jesus Is Truth**

As followers of Christ, we’re called to live in this truth and bear witness to it in a world that is often filled with deception and half-truths. Pilate’s subsequent question – which wasn’t in the lectionary reading for today – “What is truth?” (verse 38), reveals the cynicism of his time. And probably, the cynicism we have even today. In a world where truth is often manipulated for political gain, Jesus calls us to stand firm in His truth, not just as an abstract concept but as the way in which we live and interact with others.

Coupling this conversation between Jesus and Pilate on Good Friday, with Daniel’s vision which we heard earlier, helps us to gain a deeper understanding of Christ’s kingship. Daniel describes a heavenly courtroom where the Ancient of Days, who is God the Father, is seated on a throne of glory. The scene is one of awe-inspiring majesty, with millions attending to God’s court, and the books of judgment are

opened. The vision demonstrates that ultimate authority over all things belongs to God, who will judge the nations and firmly establish His righteous reign.

Later in the same passage, the vision shifts focus to one “like a son of man,” (Dan. 7:13-14), who comes with the clouds of heaven and is presented before the Ancient of Days. To this “son of man,” God gives authority, glory, and a kingdom that will never be destroyed. The rule of this figure is eternal, and His reign is one of righteousness and peace. That’s Jesus, friends. When Jesus calls Himself “Son of Man” throughout the Gospels, He is directly linking Himself to the figure Daniel saw in his vision.

### **His Reign is Eternal**

Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophetic hope for a coming king whose reign would bring justice and righteousness to the world. In the heavenly realms, this Son of Man is given authority and a kingdom that is everlasting, a kingdom that will never be shaken – unlike the kingdoms Pilate knew so well. The kingship of Christ is one of divine glory and eternal truth. Christ’s reign is not temporary, as with our earthly rulers. His kingdom is not just a political entity. It is a spiritual and eternal reign that is grounded in the truth of God’s justice and mercy. Christ’s reign is characterized by peace, righteousness, and an invitation to all people – from every nation, every tribe, every persuasion – to enter into His kingdom.

In contrast to the fleeting and corrupt kingdoms of this world, Christ’s kingdom is established on the foundation that cannot be shaken. His authority is not based on military strength or political maneuvering, but on the power of truth and love. He offers hope, justice, mercy, and salvation to all who come to Him in faith. Even so, we live in the between time, in which Christ is King, though not fully yet. He reigns in heaven, but not yet completely here on earth.

This Sunday is a reminder for us that He is King, not only at the end of time, but also in our lives today. We’re called to live under His reign, aligning ourselves with His truth and justice. The question we must ask ourselves is this: Are we living as citizens of Christ’s kingdom, or are we still trying to live by the values of the kingdoms of this world? It’s a chance for us to evaluate where we’ve been this previous year, where we are currently, and where we intend to go moving forward.

### **King of the Mountaintops and of the Valleys**

This year has been difficult for Kendra and me. We’ve lost several loved ones in our extended families. I know this year has been hard for you, too, and for us together as a local church. But Christ our King is with us in the valleys, as much as He is with us on the mountaintops. He’s King when we experience the highlights of life. He’s also King when we go through the darkest of nights. I sent out an email to you the other night if I have your email address you should have received it, and I mentioned in it

that “I can’t help but envision in my mind the Gospel story of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, when that ‘inner circle’ of His disciples saw Him briefly as He truly is.”

Peter, James, and John got to see Jesus as He truly is. And living under Christ’s reign is our opportunity to embrace the truth He brings, and live out His values of justice, mercy, and love. It’s an opportunity to reject the temptations of power, pride, and greed that dominate earthly kingdoms and follow the path of humility and service that Christ exemplifies instead. As citizens of His kingdom, we are called to reflect His glory in the way we live and interact with others. “Beloved, now we are children of God; and what we shall be is not known, but we know when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,” (1 Jn. 3:2, NKJV). And so New Hope, on this Reign of Christ Sunday, keep on doing the good and hard work of following Jesus, and letting Him be King!

**Prayer:** Most High God, Majestic and Almighty, our Beginning and our End: Rule in our hearts and guide us to be faithful in our daily actions, worshiping the One who comes as Savior and Sovereign, and who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.