



Christ the King November 21, 2021

"What have you done?"

Pastor Kirk Kerns

*"But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."
(John 18:36)*

Let us pray: Lord God, in raising Jesus from the grave you established a dominion that can never be shaken or destroyed by death. May your will be done on earth as in heaven, and make firm our faith in the certainty of your promises; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

In 1925, Pope Pius XI instituted a new liturgical observance, the Feast of Christ the King. Pope Pius felt that the followers of Christ were being lured away by the increasing secularism of the world. They were choosing to live in the kingdom of this world rather than the reign of God. But for me the reality is that people have been living in the kingdom of the world since the beginning of time. Today is no different if we really want to be honest. The kingdom of this world

produces violence many times and misunderstanding and in some cases hate for a fellow human being.

The religious authorities bring Jesus to Pilate's headquarters so that Pilate can execute Jesus. That was their plan because they couldn't do the dirty work themselves according to the Synagogue rules. Pilate asks the officials with what they want to charge Jesus with. The only response they give is that Jesus is a criminal. While they do not specify his crimes, we know that they have been seeking for ways to arrest and kill Jesus because of his challenging proclamations. In John 7:26 we read, "Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah." Since their goal is to have Jesus put to death for breaking religious law, something they cannot do, the Jewish leaders must rely on the Romans to do their dirty work.

Kingship is at the heart of this passage and Pilate left with not much to go on is trying to determine if Jesus is a rebel who wants to overthrow the kingdom that he is the procurator. Keeping power and keeping the peace are two of his main objectives. Pilate enters his headquarters again and summons Jesus, and comes right out and asks if Jesus is "the King of the Jews." Pilate doesn't ask if Jesus is the Messiah but if he is King of the Jews. Pilate doesn't get into the debate of the authorities from the Temple probably because he is more

concerned about his reign as the procurator. This is a political charge against Jesus and not a religious charge. Pilate would not care if Jesus was the anointed one of God because as he asks Jesus, "I am not a Jew am I?" Pilate would care if Jesus was a new political ruler that was coming to the forefront, one who might be a challenge to him and Roman rule.

Jesus asks Pilate what has prompted Pilate's question about not being a Jew. Was it Pilate's curiosity or charges brought by the Jewish leaders, and in doing so takes control of the interrogation. Pilate reminds Jesus that it was his own nation that has turned him over to Pilate. Then the question from Pilate that caught my attention was, "What have you done?" So what did Jesus do? That could take some time to start back at the beginning of John's Gospel to this point and one could see what all Jesus has done.

From the beginning of John's Gospel, the author has been telling us that Jesus is in fact King of Israel. For example, Nathanael declares back chapter one verse forty-nine, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel." The gospel of John then goes on to explore that Jesus is not a king that the world would ever recognize. This is a king who speaks to the lowly and the rejected. This is a king who serves rather than being served. This is a king who enters the holy city, not triumphantly on a horse, but seated on a donkey.

Jesus is a king unlike any other king, and his kingdom is unlike any other, for it is not of this world. What is this kingdom, and Jesus reign like? That is a question for us to ponder as we reflect upon Christ as our king. Jesus tells Pilate that if he was a king of this world his followers would be fighting to keep him from being handed over to the Jews. This kingdom talk is challenging but Jesus does not resist his arrest and what is going to happen to him because his kingdom is not of this world. One would have to look at this passage and think about Jesus' kingdom and what does that mean. If Jesus kingdom was of this world then naturally his followers would use the primary tool this world provides for establishing and keeping power: **violence**. But Jesus is not of this world and so Jesus will not defend himself through violence. Jesus will not establish his claims by violence. Jesus will not usher in God's kingdom by violence. Jesus will make no follower by violence.

Jesus has come to witness to the truth, the truth that God is love as we read from John 3:16, "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." The authorities who have turned Jesus over to Pilate to be executed are acting on their own experience and forgetting the experiences that God has given them over time. That is an important piece of our gospel for today is that we react

from our own experiences many times and the norm seems to be to hate our neighbor if they do not think like we do and vice versa.

This pandemic is tiring for sure for all of us and one outcome of it as I see it has been the hatred that it has brought because people don't agree with the other person. It has led to violence against our government and against each other. Being the king of this world can point one to violence and power to be in control. Jesus does not go this route with Pilate because he is not of this world and will not bow down to this world's power struggles. Jesus and his followers will not fight for him because to bring the kingdom about by violence is to violate the very principles of this kingdom and cause its destruction.

On this Christ the King Sunday, we find the opportunity to rethink our earthly kingdoms and how they affect our lives. The values of Jesus' kingdom are so vastly different from those of the world. Many have interpreted this to mean that Jesus' kingdom is somewhere in heaven and not relevant to this world. I think that Jesus is just saying what I have pointed to earlier that his kingdom is much different than the kingdoms of this world. As I think about it, maybe Pope Pius XI had a point back in 1925 when the people seemed to be drifting away from the kingdom of God and becoming more invested in the kingdom of this world.

Do we really understand the values of Jesus' kingdom compared to this worldly kingdom? This is the time of the year that we will see or hear about those good Samaritans' actions where folks are more readily willing to reach out and help a sister or brother in need. In their actions, one can see the Kingdom of God right before them. This past week I attended the Harrisburg Conference Pastor's gathering and there was a speaker there from the Ecumenical Food Pantry in Harrisburg at Messiah Lutheran Church. She gave us some statistics that I just could not visualize in that before the Pandemic hit they were serving 1700 to 2300 clients each week. Since Covid hit, they are now serving around 775. The drop is due to many factors including that there were many pop up food pantries that came into existence during this time. The extra benefits from unemployment and the child tax credits were factors in the drop. But now that these programs are coming to an end their numbers are now climbing again as the only emergency food pantry open five days a week.

This is the stuff of God's Kingdom that is all around us and we can see it and hear about it and can get involved. There is one thing missing, as I see it right now in this earthly kingdom, and that is respect and love for our neighbor. This earthly kingdom is frail and crumbling in places and at times that could mean disaster for the people living in the earthly kingdom. But the Kingdom of God the

Kingdom that Jesus stands right in the middle of is one of peace and joy that we will hear about as Christmas gets closer to us.

As the church in this place, we have the opportunity to act in love for those who are in need around us and as I said last week we do that in our giving. That does show love but are we willing to stand up against the kingdoms of this world that are counter to what Jesus is about? Can we stand up against the constant threat of violence that the earthly kingdom has given out over time?

We say each week in worship, "Peace be with you, and also with you." We gather each week at the "Welcome Table" to share in a meal that our Lord tells us to partake in. This week Carter Sobers will join us at the table of our Lord for the first time and receive the body and blood of our Lord the true presence of our Lord. It is at the table that we can find the Kingdom of God knowing that Christ is truly present in the bread and wine. It is a sign of the peaceful kingdom that we are living in when we act as our Lord calls us to do in loving our neighbor just as we love ourselves.

This all brings me back to Pilate's question to Jesus, "What have you done?" We know some of what Jesus did and will do beyond this time with Pilate because of Holy Scripture. But what is it that we are doing to lift up Jesus' Kingdom in a world that is so entwined in this earthly kingdom? All too often our imaginations

are dominated by our experiences. The key is to reflect on which experiences are part of Jesus' kingdom. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord, help us to see your kingdom in all that we do and say. Help us to resist the violence of the earthly kingdom that seems to be controlling the times. We pray that you send your peace among the people of the earth to create better understandings of each other and resist the violence that permeates our world at this time. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.