

Here we are just a few days away from Black Friday and we're reading a text we traditionally pore over just before another Black Friday in our lives that we more commonly call Good Friday. And what a contrast of events each of these Fridays holds! On the one hand, we're waiting to indulge ourselves with a glut of merchandise bargain hunting! On the other, with that hand reaching towards Easter, we keep a somber vigil with Christ as he is about to be led away and crucified. And somehow, we try to stay balanced, one foot pacing through the mall with our shopping bags and the other planted in the ground, transfixed by the memory of the cruel death suffered by the Lord of our lives!

That may seem to be a gloomy way to approach our text, this *good news* we've come searching for in worship today. Where's the rising joy to match the anticipation we have of the holidays laying just ahead? Christmas is only a few weeks away and maybe we'd just as soon jingle-bell-our-way there, with Thanksgiving as the welcome kick-off to this blessed season in our lives! Yet here we are today, seated like spectators in a courtroom, knowing full well the outcome of the conversation between Pilate and Jesus.

This is Christ the King Sunday in the life of the church. This is like a closing ceremony that takes place to commemorate a significant accomplishment in our lives. We have been on a journey with Jesus that began last year, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent. We've celebrated his birth and his baptism and the calling of the disciples. We've watched him perform miracles and heal people. We've held the vigil of another Good Friday and come together another Easter morning. And we've spent a long, hot summer, following Christ and his disciples up and down Galilee and into Samaria, as he conquered every demon he met, and along the way we've listened as he talked about God and our relationship with God. And Sabbath after Sabbath, Sunday after Sunday, we've measured our own lives in light of all we've seen and heard, and then stepped into the week ahead, seeking to engage with Christ's Way in how we live.

It is his Way that underlies the conversation between Jesus and Pilate. It took place on the night when Jesus had been arrested by

the Temple soldiers at the Mount of Olives. He had been questioned by the high priest and the ruling elders who called him a criminal. They sent him on to Pilate for punishment. Pilate wanted to know what Jesus should be punished for!

He asked Jesus if he was the King of the Jews. Any pronounced “King” of the Jews posed a threat to the Roman Empire. It was a crime that by law, demanded a sentence of death. Jesus never gave Pilate a direct answer saying he was a king. But he did admit to having a kingdom--*somewhere*. There was nothing defined or direct about that info either, except that his kingdom was *not from this world*. In essence, Jesus said he would be no threat to Pilate or to Rome or to any of the rattled Temple authorities! There would be no effort on the part of his followers to rise in any warlike effort to seize power and establish his rule over any earthly authority!

Pilate poked about the mysterious kingdom a bit, suggesting Jesus was a king since he had a kingdom. Jesus didn’t take the bait. Instead, he responded with another vague remark about his mission, his aim in life, which was to “testify,” or bear witness, to the truth! “Everyone who belongs to the truth,” he said, “listens to my voice.”

Pilate was not known for being kind or tolerant or a banner-carrying champion of social justice. Yet with Jesus, he was indecisive. The Temple authorities had presented Christ as being a danger to the government. It was Pilate’s duty to protect the Empire from any threat, his duty to determine what sort of risk Jesus was, his duty as judge and jury to sort out fact from fiction and charge or release the accused. And before him stood this man who was no “king” of a “somewhere kingdom,” who spent his days revealing the “truth,” and any who “listened” to what he said, were his followers and they “belonged to the truth.” In Pilate’s eyes, Jesus was not a “king” of any credible “kingdom” nor did he have a power-hungry aim of conquering the world with his army of “followers!” Jesus was simply a man, going about his business in life, living as a witness to something he called “the truth.”

No one on earth in Jesus' day could have ever imagined the power Christ's truth brought into the world. That truth encompassed his whole life, his birth and his mission and the way he died and the birth of the belief in his resurrection, the birth of the belief that he continues to be present in life today! No one then could ever have imagined there would be people yet today following him, living their lives in the Way of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. No one then could ever have imagined the end of the Roman Empire, that that most powerful kingdom would fall one day and crumble into the dust of the earth.

Yet we are here this morning, drawn by more than imaginations. Here we are propelled through our lives by more than vague "truths," as we are led by the *certainty* of existence of Christ, who refused to be a king. We are here to remember Christ refused to lead an army of zealots waiting to usher in and establish God's Kingdom that would once and for all replace every corrupt and cruel earthly kingdom on earth! We are here to realize that every militant effort yet today to bring God's rule to bear over the affairs of our lives is not a part of kingdom of Christ nor any part of the truth his whole life was a witness to. We are here to recount again the truth he brought to us and the Way he taught to us.

We come to this time in our church year to examine our thoughts about the Christ who leads our lives, this One whose "voice of truth" we have heard and *listened to*. We come especially, to *balance our worldly concepts* of being led and ruled by a king, with the *reality* of how this *Christ "king" revealed himself* to us. We're here to refresh our thoughts about the Christ who announced to his followers he came down to earth from heaven to serve, not to be served. Time and again, the stories we have heard, tell how he lived that "truth" before us, as he consistently reached out to the least and the lost. We're here to pause, as we realize we've given ourselves *to this Christ*, who came to bring love and forgiveness to the world, breaking away the chains of judgment and vengeance that bind us.

We're here to remember Christ gave the world his all, humbling himself as he *became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross*. And in light of all we've experienced through another year's journey with him, we're here to reach out in faith and touch the hem of his garment, and feel his healing presence close, and find his hope and his power and his strength leading us on. And not for ourselves alone, but Christ leading us on to *testify to the truth*, to bear the witness of God's love along through the days that draw us on.

Next week marks the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent. I hope to see us all together again, as we together keep this journey with Christ, the Lord and ruler of our hearts, his kingdom to be found within, where he reigns forever! *Amen! "king of our hearts, not of the world"* John 18:33-37 112121 Mkh