

TEXT: John 18:33-37 THEME: Jesus—Our King

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:33-37) NIV

Dear Fellow-Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

We don't have kings. As far as I know, none of us here today has ever lived under a king. We live in a republic, a representative sort of democracy with a balance of power: judicial, legislative and executive. We declared our independence from kings long ago and our constitution guards against any one person having absolute power—the very thing a king has in a genuine monarchy.

We Americans—and many other peoples now throughout the world—are a pretty independent bunch. We have been raised with the right not only to disagree publicly with the powers that be, but to poke fun at them without fear of reprisal. Leno and Letterman and others would be hard up for opening monologues if they didn't have Obama and Biden, Romney, Santorum, and Gingrich to mimic and mock.

So why would believers today find comfort in having Jesus as their King? Perhaps it is because we all long for the kind of king this world has never had. King David was a man after God's own heart—but was still a disappointment to himself and his people in his darker hours. King Arthur with his Camelot remains only a myth. But what if there were a king—a man with absolute power—who was not corrupted by that power? What if there were a king who used his power not for himself but for the good of his people? What if there were a king who would ultimately triumph over all that is dark and evil and set things right? What if there were a king whose promises were not political propaganda but unfailingly fulfilled? There is such a King—the Kings of kings—who made his good confession before an obscure Roman governor some 2,000 years ago.

Pilate did not understand why the Jews had brought Jesus to him, asking for the death penalty. But this talk about a king was something he could identify with, although he must have had difficulty imagining that the beaten and battered country preacher standing before him was any kind of a king. When Jesus spoke of **his kingdom**, Pilate latched onto that and stated somewhat incredulously, "**You are a king, then!**" Jesus answered, "**You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.**" Pilate could not have missed the way Jesus talks of coming into this world. Jesus implies more than a normal birth. He speaks of an existence prior to his birth, of coming into this world from outside of it and above it.

Jesus speaks of the purpose of his coming into the world—to testify to the truth. And what side you come down on in regard to this truth determines your citizenship in this invisible, untouchable kingdom.

Imagine that! A king who rules not by force of arms, not by guns or swords, not by political action groups and economic boycotts—but by the truth, by the power of a word. The truth of which Christ speaks, on which he builds an everlasting kingdom—is the only truth there is—the truth we need to know for our salvation. It is the hard truth about ourselves that “**flesh that is born of flesh is flesh,**” that we are sinful from birth. It is the truth that we must stop believing our own ridiculous press clippings about what wonderful people we are and admit that we are born enemies of God. The truth that inducts us into this imperishable kingdom is that God has designed a way back to himself, a way to make us his friends again. He extended the hand of friendship to us—both hands—nail-pierced on a cross. He ruled by serving. He stooped to conquer. He brought us life by dying. He conquered death by rising. He shall come again not to set up heaven on earth, but to take us to his home in heaven. Here is a chance even for Pilate to be drawn into this whole new world. But with a shrug of the shoulders and a world-weary: “**What is truth?**” the governor spurns the hour of grace that dawned in his own life.

“**You are a king, then!**” Pilate says. “**You are right in saying I am a King,**” Jesus says. But, you say, we are modern people. We do not have kings anymore! Oh, sure we do—all kinds of little kingdoms and fiefdoms and castles of air.

Surely we have all seen the images—over and over again—of the World Trade Towers as they collapsed into rubble. For blocks and blocks down the streets of Manhattan, people were picking up bundles of payroll checks from offices, bits and pieces of the most powerful financial institutions in the world. People have short memories. They will forget...how quickly the empires of this world collapse. We forget too...how easily the little castles of our personal comfort zones can collapse...and how the life we planned and built is not the life God may have mapped out for his children. We need to remember...that when the bank accounts and homes are gone,...when the people closest to us disappoint us,...when the deadbolt locks on our homes, the ambulances and hospitals, the police department, the military and the government all fail us,...when all the kingdoms we have built become landfill or curiosities in a museum...that there is a kingdom, a kingdom that cannot be touched by the hand of tyrants, tragedy and even death itself. And yes, there is a King who has lived from everlasting on the other side—a King who has come to our alien shores to establish a kingdom that shall never collapse.

This King: Jesus—our King rules when a dying thief says, “**Lord remember me,**” when a soldier at the foot of the cross says, “**Surely he was the Son of God,**” when the suffering and depressed find themselves in the hands of the Great Physician, when guilt-ridden hearts erase their yesterdays in the blood of his cross, when a child is received by water and the word, when a Sunday school or Lutheran elementary school teacher touches the heart of a child with the Gospel. Through his Word and sacraments, Jesus rules in our hearts as our King. And where Jesus rules, then even in the saddest places and darkest chapters, the kingdom—his kingdom of grace and glory—the kingdom ours remaineth because Jesus is our King. Amen.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE:
GIZMO FEELS SAD AND HAPPY...BUT MOST OF ALL, THANKFUL!

Gizmo: Pastor, my head is spinning!

Pastor: I think I know what you mean, Gizmo.

G: I don't know whether to be extremely happy...

P: ...or extremely sad. Yes, Gizmo, Palm Sunday makes me feel that way too.

G: The palm branches in church, the loud hosannas, the special music and songs...they all make me happy!

P: But we know what is coming later this week, don't we?

G: Betrayal, desertions, trials, beatings, crowds yelling, "Crucify!" and then a cross and death.

P: It all seems to have happened so fast!

G: Jesus rode into Jerusalem with all the people praising him on Sunday...

P: and on Friday he died on the cross. I know, it does make your head spin.

G: So, Pastor, how am I supposed to feel? Should I be happy, shout hosanna, and praise Jesus my King?

P: Yes, you can do that, Gizmo.

G: Or should I be sad because we are about to remember again how Jesus suffered and died to pay for our sins?

P: Maybe you've discovered your answer, Gizmo.

G: What's that? I don't get it.

P: You wanted to know how you should feel and I think we've found the answer.

G: What is it, Pastor? Tell me, please.

P: Thankful! You should feel thankful.

G: I see. I should be thankful that Jesus is my King—my King riding on a donkey and cheered with palm branches.

P: That's right.

G: And I should be thankful that Jesus, my King, was willing to suffer and die for me to take away my sins.

P: Exactly!

G: So, it's okay for me to feel happy...

P: if that's how you feel. Jesus deserves our praise!

G: And, it's okay for me to feel sad...

P: if that's how you feel. Jesus did suffer and die for us.

G: As long as over it all, I am thankful!

P: Yes, because riding in triumph or suffering and dying, Jesus did what he did for you and for me...for all people. He did it all to save us from our sins and take us to heaven someday.

G: So, thank you, Jesus! Thank you, my King! P: Yes, thank you Jesus! Amen.