

## **Christ The King**

Sermon for the Parish of South Darebin, 24 November 2024

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John 18: 33–37

Our family of origin and our experience have shaped the way we see the world and our faith-journey. Today we begin together our journey into God. It will be a journey of intimacy with each other and the great mystery of the Trinity. I only ever preach a thousand words. So I need to get my skates on!

In this Gospel we see Pilate in conversation with Jesus and we can ask ourselves who is the truly powerful one in this exchange? Who reigns?

While Pilate and the Jewish leaders may appear to be powerful, John's gospel presents Jesus as the one who exercises authority.

The charge of kingship is the central question of Jesus' trial before Pilate. Jesus never answers Pilate's question: "Are you the king of the Jews?" (John 18:33), in a straightforward way. As in other parts of the Gospel, John communicates some of the most important messages about Jesus' identity by enacting them in the story instead of stating them outright. John uses the trial and crucifixion to display Jesus' kingship, and the faithlessness of those who reject him.

Rather than answer Pilate's question directly, Jesus states that his kingdom is "not from here" (John 18:36), which Pilate interprets as meaning that Jesus is a king. But Jesus puts the question aside, making that Pilate's claim.

Jesus offers the idea that he is a witness to the truth (v. 37). When Jesus explains that his kingship is not from here, he identifies the origin of his authority. It is from God. Jesus does not say that his power is purely spiritual and has little to do with life here and now. We know this power does have a place in this world.

Pilate poses the question: "What is truth?" This a question for us. It is a question for our time. Is political power in this world a revelation of the Truth? Jesus faced the political power of this world at the Crucifixion. The mighty Roman empire dispensed the justice that killed Jesus. So it is an ironic twist that on this feast day we identify Jesus' actions as powerful.

We know that Jesus wasn't a hapless victim. On the cross he hands over his spirit and he witnesses to the Truth of God. This is an enacted moment, and in the end it is Jesus, not Pilate and the Jews, who exert authority over life and death. The question for us is how we live into Jesus' authority and allow it to shape our lives? How do we become citizens of this King whose power is not from or of this world?

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said it is by word and faith. I want to add it is by participation. Now you're going to learn something about me. When I hear big theological statements, I want to ask; but how does this happen? Yes, word and faith will guide us, but I want to know how. A psychologist might ask, what will that look like?

Now I want to tell you something about how we learn. We all have a preferred learning style. Some of us learn orally, we need to speak in order to distil our ideas. Some of us are aural learners, we need to hear information. Some are visual learners – we need to look and see. Some are kinaesthetic learners and we need to do things in order to learn. Some of us combine these modes in order to make information our own. With these thoughts in mind, I ask: how do we become servants of the King whose kingdom is not readily seen with the eyes? We will need to forge an individual path to learn the Truth.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus' kingship is both hidden and revealed. One example is that at his baptism the voice comes from heaven. Another is that on seeing Jesus approaching, the gospel writer says: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1: 29) And again, "I have seen and have borne witness, that this is the Son of God". (John 1: 34) These are explicit statements. There is John's recount of the calling of Philip who tells Nathaniel: "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathaniel in turn confesses of Jesus: "Rabbi, you are the son of God! You are the King of Israel." (John 1:49).

There is a constant movement of energy between what is seen and known, and what remains hidden. So, where does this information leave us in our topsy-turvy world? We see the demonstration of the evils of political power everywhere. Trump, Putin, Netanyahu, these men use ideologies to feed their lust for power with callous disregard for the wellbeing of others. Our call as members of the Kingdom of Heaven, is to develop spiritual eyes.

This is our life's work. A gift of the seed for seeing the Truth was planted at our baptism and our task is to nurture it. We stumble and fall, but on the spiritual journey we need only to lift our eyes to look to Jesus, our pattern and our King. We don't have to merit our place in his Kingdom. We are sufficient to God as we are.

If we can embrace this truth, how then should we live? With actions of love, mercy and compassion. We have just sung:

From heaven you came helpless babe,  
entered our world, your glory veiled;  
not to be served but to serve,  
and give your life that we might live.  
This is our God, the Servant King...

His death was inextricably linked to our spiritual life. The bible states that when Jesus is lifted on the cross he will “draw all people to himself” (John 12: 32). The heartbeat of the Kingdom of God is Love. It conquers all.

So what do we do till the Messiah comes? (This was the title of a trendy book for drama teachers when I began my teaching career.)

We participate in the mystery through prayer and the Eucharist. In the ritual we will soon enact to remember Jesus, he will be present to us as the guest but also the host.

Our king awaits!

*Thanks be to God.*