

Christ the King Sunday
November 25, 2018
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The Voice of Truth

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven, Amen.

With Thanksgiving in our rearview mirror, we are beginning to see signs of Christmas all around us. It seems each year Christmas comes earlier, pressuring us to get into the spirit and out to the mall. Just when we've given thanks for God's abundance in our lives, we are persuaded to acquire more, to consume more, to want more. Unchecked, these prevailing cultural values reign in our lives.

While the church may seem a little behind, our liturgical calendar gives us a little more space to prepare our hearts for the advent of Christ. Today marks the last week in the church's year called Christ the King Sunday. It is a feast day to recognize Christ's dominion and celebrate him as our king. Paradoxically, we hear the story of Jesus brought before Pontius Pilate to be condemned and crucified. His title inscribed on the throne of a cross, Jesus, King of the Jews. His pierced hand held no scepter, his crown of thorns reminds us that Christ's kingdom is not of this world.

It's not hard to imagine the confusion of Pontius Pilate as the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to be charged with insurrection. Pilate, whose job it was to maintain Roman rule and peace, seemed caught in the middle as he questioned Jesus, and found no clear reason for his condemnation. Yet his opponents would not be satisfied with his release. Kingdoms of Pilate's world acquired by war were closely protected. Perhaps if Jesus admitted he was a king, he would be considered a threat to Rome. But there was something unsettling about this man's authority. Jesus' reign was not over territory, but over something eternal; hearts and minds and priorities.

For generations we have associated kingship with power, authority, and affluence. I have been streaming a series titled "Reign," which is the story of Mary Queen of Scots. It is set in a tumultuous time in history, when European kingdoms were established not only by birthright, but by violence. It portrays a society beset by fear and rivalry, even among families. Catholics warring against Protestants, each believed they were faithfully serving God. But Jesus' story radically transforms kingship into servanthood. He does not establish his claims by violence, but comes to bring a reign of peace. He speaks not of the love of power, but the power of love. Jesus said to Pilate, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." But Pilate was swayed by the pressures of his current kingdom.

We too, are under the constant influence of our culture's values. Position and possessions hold little importance in the eternal, yet seem so crucial in the here and now. Jesus tells us that those who belong to the truth listen to his voice. Who is our king amidst the competing voices in our lives? If we belong to the truth and to the kingdom of God, how then are we to live in this world? Do we like our forebears think we are following God's will, yet live by our own agenda? Our divided loyalties leave us confused and afraid.

Parker Palmer, a Quaker author and activist wrote in his book, Let your life speak; "Seeking a path more purposeful than accumulating wealth, holding power, winning at competition, or securing a career, I had started to understand that it is indeed possible to live a life other than

one's own. Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent." If we are listening to the voice that dwells within us, to the voice of truth, fear will not reign in our lives. Palmer calls us to an undivided life where our actions reflect the truth our heart claims.

But realistically, we live in two kingdoms, the kingdom of the everyday and the kingdom of God. We are called to struggle in this world and to be active participants in making the world more peaceable and a better place. But we are also to look past the daily challenges to a more eternal kingdom, to see mystery and the divine in the everyday, to find Christ in the other. Palmer writes of the "inner teacher" in all of us who calls us to wholeness and peace. This inner teacher we may call Christ, surrounds us with love that leads us from division to unity, from contrasts to integration. Christ is the place where our paradoxical nature is held together. Just as Jesus laid down his life and the power came to him as a gift from God, power comes to us when we allow Jesus to reign in our lives. What would be different in your life if Jesus truly ruled your heart?

Christ the king is the moment toward which the whole Christian story moves, the celebration of Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father, one God forever. Yet as we leave the story of Christ's kingship, we must hold on to the promise and hope this day brings. For we begin the story anew as we enter Advent. Once again we will wait for the light to pierce the darkness, for hope to come and for power to be shrouded in the vulnerability of a child.

This Advent season we are invited to listen for the voice of truth amidst all the prevailing voices that try to claim us. I pray that we choose the voice of truth and live as members of a kingdom that reigns in peace. Then we may wait with hope and look for the Christ who comes in the most unexpected ways. I will close with the words of this sonnet written by poet James King.

Sonnet for the Reign of Christ

*You, upon your throne of self-giving love
set upon a garbage-heap—that tower
of wood where on a dark day you are shoved
(to be rid of you) by the world's powers—
you who called the blind to new ways of sight
and freed from their chains the captives to fear
and despair; who, with love's strength in fresh light,
called the lost from graves, yet commanding here
no armies, holding here no sword, allow
yourself to suffer death for others—your
rule is surely not of this world. But how
surely it is our need! Show us the door
to true peace, O Christ. Rule our hearts: your voice
our one guide. Your way of love our one choice.*

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, Amen.