

Being the Church at Brentwood

What Kind of King?

**Ps 93 & John 18:33-38
(428, 340, 350, 358)**

November 25, 2012

Pilate was confused and frustrated.
I suspect he was used to feeling this way.

He was, after all, the Roman prefect of Judea,
with military and judicial responsibilities for that region of the Roman Empire.
His job was to keep the peace in a troubled part of the Empire.

The Jewish priests have brought this trouble maker, Jesus of Nazareth,
into Pilate's court to be judged, condemned, and sentenced to crucifixion.
It is the highest of Jewish holidays – Passover –
so Jerusalem is crowded and tense.

The Jews are a people again under occupation by a foreign power,
taxed and troubled to the point of insurrection.

Many are awaiting the Messiah,
a new king of the Jews who will be
the descendent of King David who God promised would free them for good.
A small band of disciples believes that Jesus is that Messiah.
But those claims are vehemently rejected by the Jewish powers that be.
They enlist the power of the Empire to rid them of this upstart.

So, in John's account of the encounter with Pilate,
we have this short exchange about Jesus being the King of the Jews.

Pilate asks Jesus point-blank whether he is King of the Jews.
Jesus wonders where the question came from,
Pilates' own conclusion or what others had told him.
Pilate, if effect, says he got the idea from Jesus' own people,
from the high priests who handed him over to be crucified.
Jesus then claims that his kingdom
does not belong to Pilates' world of power and politics.
If it was that kind of kingdom,
His followers would be fighting in his defence.
But that was not happening.

Jesus had a different idea
about how to use the power of human energy and ingenuity.

Jesus had a different idea
about how to bring people together into a flourishing community.

Jesus had a different idea
about what truth was and how to revere it.

“What,” Pilate said in confusion and frustration, “is truth?”

The answer stood before him,
though he did not have the frame of reference to understand it.
His gut told him this was someone special,
a presence that invited reverence and awe.
But the responsibilities of his position,
the duty to maintain law and order in a troubled territory,
were of primary importance to him,
were his gods,
and he obeyed them by condemning Jesus to death.

The truth for which Pilate had reverence,
the divinity of the Roman Emperor to whom Pilate remained loyal,
the need to exercise coercive control to maintain the power of that god,
framed Pilates’ decision and led to the death of this upstart.

Pilate never did understand the kind of king Jesus was.
He never did understand the truth Jesus taught.
He never did listen to what Jesus was saying.
He never did understand his own limitations and lack of control
over the redemptive work Jesus came to do for all people.

It was, and continues to be, work that invites people to see things differently.
It changes the way they ‘deem’ or see the world.
Jesus is not saying to Pilate that he does not belong in this world.
Jesus is saying, though Pilate doesn’t hear it,
that he sees the world differently.
Pilate sees power and politics dominating everything.
Jesus sees that loving grace of the world’s Creator dominating everything.
And that’s a real threat
to those who want to keep everything within their control,
whether that control be who rules the world
or who gets to define God.

Jesus sees the world through different eyes,
with a different heart,
with an ancient wisdom grounded in God’s patient grace.

Jesus, in fact, is one with the Energy that set everything in motion.
He is one with the Creator
whose intent was for flourishing community of God, humans, and nature
dancing with each other in delight for all eternity.

That kind of community is filled with
love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility, and reverent self-control.

This is the community, the commonwealth, the covenant people
over which Christ is King.
It exists within, yet transcends,
all of the smaller, more limited, communities
into which humans have organized themselves.
It exists within, yet transcends,
all of our ethnic, political, economic, and social loyalties.

It provokes Jew and Palestinian,
American and Taliban,
Chinese and Taiwanese,
North Korean and South Korean,
Hindu and Muslim,
to see things differently,
to become reverent before a power greater than themselves,
to be in awe of the common source of our being
that underlies all our diversity.
We are all the beloved children of God,
the one God who created us to flourish
by blessing one another and enjoying one another
in relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is the kind of world over which Jesus Christ reigns.

As we will hear over and over again during Advent,
it is a commonwealth of collaboration,
where true wealth is shared in common and used to bless the whole creation.

It is a peaceable kingdom,
where, as God promised through the prophet Isaiah,
“the wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.” (11:6)

Our calling as Christians,
the invitation to which we are encouraged daily to respond,
is to be reverent before this Jesus,
to be in awe of this kind of King.

It begins by allowing him to become the gentle and loving ruler
of the energies we have been given to use in blessing this world.

It extends outward as we touch others with His love
and invite them to acknowledge its presence and obey it.

It becomes even more powerful
as we work to shape the communities of which we are a part
according to the vision of peace proclaimed and lived by Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is forming us for this kind of witness.
The Holy Spirit is inspiring us to reverence and awe
focused on the commonwealth of peace inaugurated in Jesus Christ.

Following that kind of King is not easy
among those who see the world only as a violent clash of interests.
But it is necessary if we are to realize God's original intent for us.
It is necessary if we are to bring the energy of all of our gifts
into the service of the King of Peace.

*May these thoughts and urgings be used by the Holy Spirit
to form us all for witness to the mission of Jesus Christ.*

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