

John 18:33-37

TODAY WE BRING THE CHRISTIAN YEAR TO A CONCLUSION. IN THE CHURCH'S CALENDAR, CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY IS THE PARALLEL OF THE SUPER BOWL OR THE FINAL FOUR IN COLLEGE BASKETBALL OR THE LAST GAME OF THE WORLD SERIES. THIS IS WHERE EVERYTHING HAS BEEN MOVING TOWARD. IN BASEBALL, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS SPRING TRAINING, THE OPENING PITCH OF THE SEASON, THE FIRST GAMES, THE LONG SUMMER, THE END-OF-YEAR STRETCH, THE PLAYOFFS. IT ALL LEADS, FOR SOMEONE, TO THE WORLD SERIES.

IN THE CHRISTIAN YEAR, IT BEGINS WITH ADVENT, PREPARATION FOR THE BIRTH OF JESUS; AND THEN THE CELEBRATION OF HIS BIRTH AT CHRISTMAS, AND THEN HIS APPEARANCES—TO THE WISE MEN, IN THE TRANSFIGURATION AT EPIPHANY, AND THEN HE SETS HIS FACE TOWARD JERUSALEM AND WE ARE PLUNGED INTO THE DAYS OF LENT, SUFFERING, SACRIFICE AND SELF-DENIAL, THE BETRAYAL AND DEATH OF HOLY WEEK AND THEN THE MIRACLE OF RESURRECTION AT EASTER, AND THE PRAYER, OVER 50 DAYS, FOR THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST.

AND THEN WE MOVED THROUGH ORDINARY TIME, AND WERE CALLED ON TO REFLECT ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN EVERYDAY LIFE, BUT ALL OF IT MOVING TOWARD THE CONCLUSION. TODAY.

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE PRAYED: THY KINGDOM COME? EVERY SUNDAY AT LEAST WHEN WE PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER. THE CONCEPT OF GOD'S KINGDOM IS WOVEN SO TIGHTLY INTO THE FABRIC OF OUR FAITH. WHAT KIND OF KINGDOM? WHAT KIND OF KING RULES? WHILE WE MIGHT SAY IT IS OBVIOUS THAT IT IS GOD'S KINGDOM, LET'S BE HONEST THAT WHAT THE KINGDOM REALLY MEANS IS NOT ALWAYS EASY TO ANSWER. WE SHARE PILATE'S QUESTION TODAY, "SO YOU ARE A KING?"

PILATE WAS CONFUSED, FOR A KING IN HIS THINKING MEANT POWER AND GRANDEUR, NOT A HUMBLE, POOR TEACHER. SOMETHING IN THIS PICTURE JUST DIDN'T SEEM RIGHT. WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED AT THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF WHO JESUS WAS. JOHN OPENED HIS GOSPEL WITH A PREMISE THAT HIS OWN KNEW HIM NOT. AND AFTER CENTURIES AND LITERALLY MILLIONS OF CHURCH SERVICES, DO WE REALLY KNOW EITHER?

VITAL TO HOW WE ANSWER THE QUESTION IS THE REALIZATION THAT OUR COMMITMENTS MAKE US WHO WE ARE. WHEN WE PRAY FOR THE COMING OF A KINGDOM, WHAT KIND OF KING ARE WE PRAYING FOR?

WHAT KIND OF KING DO WE WORSHIP? AS I STATED, TODAY IS THE LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR, HOWEVER IT IS NOT AN ANCIENT FESTIVAL LIKE EASTER OR CHRISTMAS. IN FACT, IT IS ONLY ABOUT 100 YEARS OLD. IT WAS FIRST CALLED BY POPE PIUS 11th IN 1925. EUROPE WAS IN CHAOS. INFLATION WAS RAMPANT, AND COLONIALISM WAS AT ITS WORST. THE SEEDS OF EVIL THAT WERE TO PRODUCE THE TERROR OF THE HOLOCAUST AND WW II WERE BEING PLANTED. AGAINST ALL THIS CHAOS AND EVIL, THE POPE ESTABLISHED THE FESTIVAL OF CHRIST THE KING TO DECLARE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS KING. HE IS THE GOAL OF

ALL HUMAN HISTORY, THE JOY OF ALL WHO HEAR, AND THE FULFILLMENT OF OUR ASPIRATIONS.

WE NEED THIS YEARLY REMINDER DON'T WE?

THIS LAST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR BEFORE WE BEGIN THE FORMAL PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS IS A CALL TO REMEMBER THAT WE HAVE MORE THAN THE BABY JESUS OF CHRISTMAS. WE HAVE A SOVEREIGN CHRIST. WHEN WE KNOW WHAT KIND OF KING WE HAVE, WE CAN SING WITH GREAT FAITH, "JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD IS COME. LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING."

IN THIS SEASON OF THANKSGIVING, WE CELEBRATE THE REIGN OF CHRIST THE KING. YET WHO IS LISTENING? WE TEND TO BE LIKE PILATE VERBALLY SPARRING WITH JESUS. "WHAT KIND OF KING ARE YOU AFTER ALL? AND BY THE WAY, WHAT IS TRUTH ANYWAY? NO ONE BELIEVES IN SUCH THINGS ANY LONGER." SO THE WITNESS IS NOT HEARD, AND WE WONDER WHY OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE IS NOT CLEAR AND WHY WE SO EASILY LOSE HOPE.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE KINGDOM IS FOR EACH OF US TO LET GOD BE GOD IN US...TO LET GOD BE GOD IN OUR CHURCH...TO LET GOD BE GOD IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS...TO LET GOD BE GOD IN OUR JOBS, IN OUR FAMILIES, AND IN OUR WORLD.

THE ISSUE IN OUR GOSPEL AND FOR OUR LIVES IS WHO IS REALLY IN CHARGE. MARY GAVE A ONE-LINE SERMON TO THE ATTENDANTS AT THE WEDDING FEAST WHO RAN OUT OF WINE. "DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU." THAT'S WHAT WE NEED STAMPED ON OUR MORNING CUPS OF COFFEE TO BE REMINDED THAT TO FIND MEANING, PURPOSE, AND PEACE, WE MUST KEEP ASKING OURSELVES, "WHAT IS JESUS TELLING ME TO DO WITH MY LIFE?" WHEN WE DO ASK AND LISTEN FOR AN ANSWER, THEN WE ARE EXPERIENCING THE POWER OF HIS KINGDOM IN OUR MIDST.

CELEBRATING CHRIST AS OUR KING ALSO MEANS THAT WE DISCERN WITH CHRIST AND ONE ANOTHER THE WAYS IN WHICH FALSEHOODS, MISINFORMATION, AND DISINFORMATION INFILTRATE OUR COMMUNITIES. IF WE LISTEN TO CHRIST TESTIFY TO THE TRUTH, THEN WE ALSO LISTEN FOR HOW CHRIST'S TRUTH DOESN'T ALIGN WITH MESSAGES WE MAY RECEIVE FROM THE WORLD. RATHER THAN ASKING WHAT WOULD JESUS DO LET US ASK IN EVERY SITUATION..WHAT WOULD JESUS THE KING DO IN THIS SITUATION?

AN OLD LEGEND TOLD OF A YOUNG WARRIOR WHO FOUND A LONE EAGLE EGG. TO BE HELPFUL, HE PLACED IT IN THE NEST OF A PRAIRIE CHICKEN. THE LITTLE EAGLE GREW UP WITH PRAIRIE CHICKS, PECKING AND CLUCKING AROUND THE GROUND FOR WORMS, INSECTS, AND SEEDS. LIFE WAS ONE PLEASANT DAY AFTER DAY—NO CHALLENGES. WHEN THE EAGLET FLEW, LIKE THE PRAIRIE CHICKS, HE NEVER ROSE MORE THAN A FEW FEET OFF THE GROUND. THE YEARS PASSED BY AND THE EAGLET GREW AND MATURED.

ONE DAY, SCRATCHING THE GROUND, THE EAGLE GLANCED UP. SOARING IN THE CLOUDS WAS THE MOST SPLENDID BIRD HE'D EVER SEEN. HE COULDN'T TAKE HIS EYES AWAY FROM THE BIRD'S GORGEOUS, STRONG, GOLDEN WINGS. IT SEEMED NOT TO MOVE AS IT COMMANDED THE SKY.

THE SCRATCHER ASKED THE HEAD PRAIRIE CHICKEN WHAT THE NOBLE BIRD WAS. "THAT'S AN EAGLE, THE CHIEF OF BIRDS, BUT HE'S FAR ABOVE YOU. KEEP SCRATCHING." THE EAGLE KEPT SCRATCHING THE GROUND. HE DIED, NEVER REALIZING THAT HE WAS NOT A PRAIRIE CHICKEN.

WE DO NOT BELONG TO THIS WORLD...WITH ALL OF ITS TEMPTATIONS, LURS AND FALSE PROMISES. WE BELONG TO ANOTHER WORLD...WHERE LOVE WINS AND WE ARE LOVED BY OUR CREATOR. WE MUST NOT SETTLE, WITH HEADS DOWN, SCRATCHING AROUND IN THE WORLD'S MESSINESS AND MUCK. LOOK UP TO YOUR KING, EMBRACING YOUR CITIZENSHIP AS A MEMBER OF HIS KINGDOM.

JOHN MANSFIELD, IN HIS PLAY "THE TRIAL OF JESUS," PICTURES PILATE'S WIFE REMAINING IN THE JUDGMENT HALL LONG AFTER EVERYBODY ELSE HAS LEFT. FINALLY, A SOLDIER WHO HAD TAKEN PART IN THE CRUCIFIXION COMES IN, AND SHE ASKS HIM, "IS HE DEAD YET?" THE SOLDIER SHAKES HIS HEAD AND SAYS, "NO, HE IS NOT DEAD." SHE QUESTIONS HIM FURTHER, "BUT SURELY HE IS DEAD, HE HAS BEEN HANGING THERE SO LONG NOW." AND THE SOLDIER REPLIES, "NO, HE IS NOT DEAD. HIS LOVE LET LOOSE IN THE WORLD NOW, AND NEITHER JEW NOR ROMAN CAN STOP HIM."

PILATE COULD SEE NO FURTHER THAN WHAT WAS BEFORE HIS EYES, A PRISONER ABOUT WHICH SOME MADE OUTLANDISH CLAIMS. JESUS SAW BEYOND THAT MOMENT TO THE GREATER TRUTH. THE FUTURE, AS THE PAST, IS IN GOD'S HANDS.

AS WE CELEBRATE CHRIST AS OUR KING, LET US BE THANKFUL: GOD HAS LOVED US AND GAVE US HIS SON. CHRIST WALKS WITH US TODAY. OUR LORD AWAITS US IN ALL OUR TOMORROWS. REJOICE! THE LORD IS KING! AMEN.