

Christ the King Sunday – Year B

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Sunday, November 21, 2021

The Holy Gospel comes from the 18th chapter of John, beginning with the 33rd verse.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own? Or did others tell you about me?”

Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”

Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not from this world. If my Kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my Kingdom is not from here.”

Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?”

Jesus answered, “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.”

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Who are you?

Jesus and Pilate are doing a little dance.

Peter has denied Jesus.

And Jesus has been taken to Pilate's headquarters by the Jews, because they are not permitted to put anyone to death.

But Pilate could...

Pilate asked the crowd, what accusation do you bring against this man? They answered, no, not really. If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.

Pilate tries to give Jesus back to the crowd, but the crowd would not have it.

So, Pilate summons Jesus and then the famous question who are you? Are you who they say you are or not?

Are you who you say you are? Or not.

Are we part of that “everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” crowd?

Or are we a part of the crowd, wanting someone else to deal with this, Jesus?

Friends, this Jesus following isn't for the faint of heart.

It can break our hearts as we bear witness to the pain of others...as we walk with those who are fearful. And yet it's exactly what we were called to be when we were washed in the waters of our baptism.

Listening to the voice of the one who came, who lived among us, who died of violent death, but rose again for us. All of us.

All y'all. Everyone. No matter what.

I want to listen to that voice and on my best days in my best self, I do. But I know it's also easier to blame it on the crowd, than recognize myself in that crowd.

As one participating in and promoting the things I think I wouldn't do myself, without the crowd pushing me alone.

This is the part of the story where I know my late husband would have something to say about the crowd we keep. It was his constant advice to the young adults who came in and out of our lives: "Be very careful...how you choose and who you choose as your friends. Know your crowd."

These days the crowd is loud and boisterous and sometimes just the wrong group to be a part of.

The crowd wanted Pilate to do their dirty work - work they knew was wrong; work they wanted done out of fear for their position for their understanding of the world and of their power. They let someone else take care of things that upset their going their merry way, without the challenge of this, Jesus, who challenged all they knew.

Friends, it's time to be challenged again by this Jesus. Jesus was that one thing that reminder that persistent call to be different and sometimes, I don't want to change - we don't want to change.

Jesus is called to love and care for the least of these ended in his violent death, but that very death killed our death. Jesus' violent death on the cross was not the end, but only the beginning of something different. Something new and something beyond our capacity to understand it.

Late Martin Luther King Junior talks about violence in this way: he said "the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seems it seeks to destroy; instead of just diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence, you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence, you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate.

"So it goes returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness - only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate - only love can do that."

Those are beautiful words that speak to a world devoid of stars. In our darkness, only love can drive out hate - only love. Being in relationship with those so different from ourselves that can move us toward reconciliation and love. This is not a task we can hand off to the crowd or to pilot.

We have to do the work ourselves of holding onto this message of Jesus. This message of love in the midst of uncertainty, fear and violence.

Jesus came into this world to testify to the truth. The truth is we have used religion to hurt, and that can't be the Jesus truth. We've used religion to make others less than, and that can't be the Jesus truth. We've used religion in ways that hurt others, and that can't be the Jesus truth.

Listening to the voice of Jesus means we pay attention to the least of these instead of moving them out of the way. We see Christ in those who beg on the streets, rather than looking away. We love our neighbors as ourselves, rather than speak ill of them, even the ones who are oh so hard to love.

Because I want to be accused of saying Jesus is king, and knowing that being a king meant something very different from our understanding.

Being a servant King means the last shall be first and the first last.

I pray we each step away from the crowd.

And not get caught up in the musings of the crowd.

But are bold enough to say Jesus is Lord!

And that means love, grace, service, resurrection and life everlasting.

Let that be our truth. Let that be our response to the violence and hatred of this world that is sometimes devoid of stars.

May we be liked! Shining a light on injustice. Doing the work of forgiveness and loving our neighbors.

All of our neighbors.

Let that be our crowd.

And let us do the work.

Amen!