

Christ the King – 2024 B

When Jesus is on trial before Pilate, he passes from the expected questioning by a judge ... “Are you the King of the Jews? What have you done?” ... to the deeper issue: “Where are you from?” He is beginning to suspect that this is no ordinary rebel against Rome’s power. And at that moment before His death, Jesus brings us back to His birth: **“You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”** We know well Pilate’s reply, itself a question: “Truth! What is that?” Pilate could understand military power, the ability to command, the Roman Empire’s control over peoples, -- these are foundations for a kingdom. But what kind of power is *truth*? He could make no sense of it.

Scripture gives us two images of Christ the King. There is the Lord of the Universe, the One Who Is, and Who Was, and Who Is to Come, with royal robes and a golden crown, seated on a heavenly throne. But the same Lord is also stripped of His garments, crowned with thorns, nailed in hands and feet to the throne of the Cross. Christ is King, the Word through Whom all things were made, the One to whom the angels sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” But it is also Christ the King who was born in poverty and laid in a manger; who entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey; and who bore our weakness and sins on a Cross. Both are true, and in this truth we are set free. Whether we experience peace and success, or suffering and loss, we are close to this King. Indeed, as Paul says, both in life and in death, we are the Lord’s. ***No other King has ever made such a claim.***

Jesus makes it clear that His Kingdom is not of this world. So as his followers, we are pilgrims here, and while we strive to make the world a better place, our goal is not an earthly utopia. ***Suffering, tragedy, violence, evil ... their presence in the world does not indicate Christ’s Kingship is failing, but only that the mystery of the Cross remains our hope and our refuge.*** Indeed, even Daniel’s vision of the Son of Man came **during the darkness**. Our sufferings are part of the Truth of a fallen world, wounded by sin ... but they are not the WHOLE Truth, for they have called forth from God the mystery of His mercy.

Through the Cross, we come to know God's goodness in a far deeper way. Instead of imposing His power, Jesus accepts our weakness and even death ... and this reveals the love of our King in the way that baffled Pilate and still has the power to change the world today.

You can read more about this in the bulletin, but you will remember that over Jesus' head on the Cross, Pilate posted his crime, rebellion against Rome's power: 'The King of the Jews.' The chief priests tried to have him change it, but Pilate answered: 'What I have written, I have written.' Pilate's phrase carries two meanings. On the surface, it is an assertion of his authority as a Roman official and likely his frustration with his role in this difficult job of managing the religious fervor of Jerusalem. But underneath is the fatalism of saying: "I can't and I won't change what I have done. It is final."

The irony for St. John is that *it is precisely the sacrifice of the Cross that overcomes that fatalism of human history by the presence of divine grace. Mercy cannot change the past, but it does redeem it. Forgiveness does not erase what we have said or done, but it can give us a new future of hope. Christ, the King, has this power to heal, to restore, to redirect our lives into better paths.*

For "what I have written, I have written" also has a positive meaning. The sacrifices we make, the good we do, the kindness we show remain, "inscribed in the Book of Life" as the Book of Revelation puts it. Today, we reflect on who or what is truly sovereign in our lives. Whose voice do we follow? What light is our guide? What out of my past still holds me captive and needs the mercy of God to heal and set me free? And above all: what do we want to be read about our lives when we say: "What I have written, I have written?"