

Christ the King Sunday

John 18:28-19:22

1. Truth, not treachery.

- *John 18:37-38; John 14:6*

2. Dignified, not indignant.

- *John 19:9-10*

3. Prophetic, not political.

- *John 19:14-15*

4. Affirmed, not asserted.

- *John 19:10-11; Colossians 1:13*

5. Sacrifice, not sedition.

6. Love, not law.

- *John 18:33*

7. King, not king.

- *John 19:17-22*

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West Valley Church
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Michael O'Neill

Christ the King Sunday

John 18:28-19:22

Today is the day in the calendar of the Christian Church that is called "Christ the King" Sunday. This day is a reminder to us that Jesus is King over all creation, both because he created it and because he bought it back after we humans sinned and sold it to Satan – Jesus bought us and creation back out of sin by his death and resurrection.

Christ the King Sunday is a part of the ancient Christian calendar, which set days and seasons to help remind people of the events of the story of God. Today is the last Sunday of that calendar, and next Sunday – the first Sunday of Advent – is the first Sunday of the Christian year. The ancient Christian calendar starts with a six-month period, beginning next Sunday with the four Sundays of Advent, a season to remind us that Christ came into this world as a human, and a reminder that we are also anticipating his return – his final "Advent." After the season of Advent is the season of "Christmas" – it's what the "Twelve Days of Christmas" song refers to. It begins on Christmas Day. After that is the season of "Epiphany" which reminds us of the ways that God reveals himself to us in Jesus. Then comes the season of Lent, which reminds us of Jesus' passion and crucifixion. Then comes the season of Easter, telling the story of Jesus' resurrection. Finally is the season of Pentecost, which tells the story of Jesus' ascension into Heaven and the Holy Spirit being poured out into our lives, empowering us to live for Jesus all of our "ordinary" days – which is what the *next* six months of the year are called. All of that concludes today – the day of Christ the King, reminding us that Christ is king and will return as king, pointing us to the end of time when Jesus' reign will be established in the new creation and sin and death will no longer exist.

So today, we want to think about Jesus as our King. The idea of a king is a hard one for us in our culture to understand. We don't recognize kings, unless we are talking about ourselves, because in our society, we like to think of ourselves as the masters of our fate, the ones in control and no one's going to tell us what we can and can't do. We think and act like we are kings and queens of our lives.

So today, I want to help us get a better understanding of what kind of King Jesus is. This is a message I preached a couple of years ago, but I think it is worth revisiting because of everything going on in the world right now. We have kings of nations that are using and abusing authority, whether they are politicians or presidents or prime ministers or Putin or premiers or imams or mullahs or dictators. With wars in Europe and the Middle East, it is timely that we remember who King Jesus is.

A really good place to see Jesus as King and to learn about his Kingdom is in the part of His story when He was arrested and was a prisoner, tortured and killed. It's ironic, I guess, that in what seems like Jesus' weakest, most vulnerable, most stricken state, that it's *there* we see the dignity, the authority, the power, and the love of the King – the One who deserves

all our praise and our very lives.

So let's start by looking at that part of Jesus' story. I'm not going to ask you to stand as I read this, because it's a long passage, and I'm going to stop and make comments as we go through it. Remember that this story takes place during Holy Week – between Palm Sunday and Good Friday and Easter Sunday. You can follow along with the passage on the screen:

Early in the morning (*about 6am*) Jesus was taken from Caiaphas' house (*Caiaphas was the high priest, and after the Jews arrested Jesus, they took him there first for a secret "religious" trial, to figure out how to best get him killed. Once they had their plan, they took Jesus from there*) to the governor's palace. The Jewish authorities did not go inside the palace, for they wanted to keep themselves ritually clean, in order to be able to eat the Passover meal (*Let me explain that: the Passover supper was eaten with unleavened bread, or bread without yeast. The ritual required that, for them to participate, they could not be exposed to any place that had yeast, because yeast represented sin, and the governor's palace was filled with all kinds of bread with yeast in it – and with sin.*). So Pilate went outside to them and asked, "What do you accuse this man of?" (*a natural question for anyone sitting as judge in a trial*) Their answer was, "We would not have brought him to you if he had not committed a crime." Pilate said to them, "Then you yourselves take him and try him according to your own law." (*Pilate really didn't want to be bothered with their issues, especially when he was trying to keep Roman rule in a place where there were thousands of Jews gathered for the Passover. The potential for an insurrection was huge.*) They replied, "We are not allowed to put anyone to death." (*Roman law allowed the Jews to carry out their own civil and religious laws and punishments, but forbade them from capital punishment. Only Rome had the right to give the death sentence and carry it out.*) (This happened in order to make come true what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he would die.) (*I'll explain that later.*) Pilate went back into the palace and called Jesus. (*So Jesus went into Pilate's residence.*) "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him. Jesus answered, "Does this question come from you or have others told you about me?" Pilate replied, "Do you think I am a Jew? (*I need to just briefly say that Pilate hated the Jews—he held them in contempt, he had no respect for them, and he was a bad governor, on thin ice with his superiors. Pilate's question is filled with contempt.*) It was your own people and the chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No, my kingdom does not belong here!" So Pilate asked him, "Are you a king, then?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me." "And what is truth?" Pilate asked. Then Pilate went back outside to the people and said to them, "I cannot find any reason to condemn him. But according to the custom you have, I always set free a prisoner for you during the Passover. Do you want me to set free for you the king of the Jews?" They answered him with a shout, "No, not him! We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a bandit.)

(*Here we see that Pilate, for all his bad qualities, realized that Jesus was innocent and*

didn't deserve what the Jews were doing to him. So he tried to set Jesus free. But don't think it's because he cared about Jesus; he's more afraid that a possible uprising would get him in trouble with his superiors. Mostly though he wanted to antagonize and frustrate the Jews.) Then Pilate took Jesus and had him whipped. *(He did this thinking that it would appease the crowd.)* The soldiers made a crown out of thorny branches and put it on his head; then they put a purple robe on him and came to him and said, "Long live the King of the Jews!" And they went up and slapped him. Pilate went back out once more and said to the crowd, "Look, I will bring him out here to you to let you see that I cannot find any reason to condemn him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. *(Pilate was hoping that, if they saw Jesus' pitiful state, the crowd would have some compassion and back off of what was becoming a very volatile situation.)* Pilate said to them, "Look! Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the Temple guards saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "You take him, then, and crucify him. I find no reason to condemn him." *(Pilate knew that the Jews couldn't do that, and he was reminding the Jewish leaders they had no authority. It was a power play.)* The crowd answered back, "We have a law that says he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. *(Pilate believed in a lot of gods, and he'd heard the rumors about Jesus, so he thought that maybe Jesus was one of those Gods. He's not really religious as much as he is superstitious.)* He went back into the palace and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?" But Jesus did not answer. Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Remember, I have the authority to set you free and also to have you crucified." Jesus answered, "You have authority over me only because it was given to you by God. So the man who handed me over to you is guilty of a worse sin." When Pilate heard this, he tried to find a way to set Jesus free. But the crowd shouted back, "If you set him free, that means that you are not the Emperor's friend! Anyone who claims to be a king is a rebel against the Emperor!" *(The Jews were reminding Pilate of his tenuous position with the Emperor—he'd had several run-ins before. This was a thinly veiled threat that they will report Pilate to Caesar, so Pilate would be removed from his position. That was the checkmate—Pilate now had to do what they were asking.)* When Pilate heard these words, he took Jesus outside and sat down on the judge's seat in the place called "The Stone Pavement." (In Hebrew the name is "Gabbatha.") It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, "Here is your king!" They shouted back, "Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "The only king we have is the Emperor!" *(Meaning Caesar. This was blasphemous for Jews to claim allegiance to an Emperor instead of God!)* Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. So they took charge of Jesus. He went out, carrying his cross, and came to "The Place of the Skull," as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called "Golgotha.") There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," is what he wrote. Many people read it, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city. The notice was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The chief priests said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am the King of the Jews.' " Pilate answered, "What I have

written stays written." (John 18:28—19:1-22, gnt)¹

There are so many dynamics and politics going on in that passage, and I wish we had time to explore them all. But what we *are* going to look at today is the juxtaposition between two kings – between Pilate and Jesus. Because what we just read is packed with instances and examples of the Kingship and Kingdom of Jesus. So I want to show you seven examples of King Jesus from this passage. First, Jesus has a Kingdom based on...

1. ***Truth***, not ***treachery***.

There's a significant contrast in this story between Jesus, whose kingly reign is one of Truth, and Pilate, who's entire kingdom was built on treachery. Pilate got to the place he was by cheating, lying, bribing, stealing and murdering. Look again at the interchange between them:

So Pilate asked him, "Are you a king, then?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me." "And what is truth?" Pilate asked. Then Pilate went back outside to the people and said to them, "I cannot find any reason to condemn him." (John 18:37-38, gnb)

Pilate says, literally, "So, you are a king?" and Jesus affirms his Kingship. Jesus makes it clear that yes, he is a king, but his kingdom is not of this world or its principles. Jesus says that he was born to carry out the mission of Truth; that was his purpose.

We are living in a time when it is difficult to trust people in leadership, especially in government and media. We've got people believing some of the most extreme things, and I honestly don't know where they are getting their information from, because it doesn't seem to be based in reason or in accurate sources. So many people are polarized and so infused with anger and poison hatred that it's hard to trust any message no matter what side you are on with any particular issue. And in some cases, it's hard to even trust pastors, when you see pastors who are abusing people with their positions of power or are driven by celebrity and money. Those kind of pastors don't make my job any easier, that's for sure. But listen: even when you can't trust the leadership of *any* person, you can *always* trust everything Jesus tells you, because He is Truth. In fact, Jesus said:

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6, niv)

Listen: Jesus Kingship is one of Truth, not treachery.

The nature of Jesus' sovereignty matches the nature of his mission: He is the King of truth, and he shows his authority not by control or coercion, but by the life and example of Truth that he lives. I hope you see that; that is entirely different than our kings and those in authority in our society.

Then in the story, we see Jesus doing what he always does with people: he gets to the point of their own personal life. Jesus responded to Pilate very pointedly and personally, trying

¹ *Italicized sections are my comments*

to get at Pilate's potential spiritual life, by saying: "Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me." Jesus is essentially saying, "If you are willing to listen to me, you will hear the truth you are looking for." Of course, Pilate was not.

Are *you* willing to listen to Jesus, the King? His authority is unlike any you've ever known; he won't manipulate or deceive you. There is no hidden agenda. He is completely 100% trustworthy—everything he says is truth, but you must be willing to listen to him.

Right now we live in a volatile, politicized society, filled with outright lies coming from all sides. Honestly, the amount of hatred and lies and delusion is just evil. And I've said it before, but the marginalization and scapegoating of Christianity is getting worse. So with so many polar opposite opinions hating each other, who can we trust? Wouldn't it be nice to have a leader who never lies? You could trust a leader like *that*. That's Jesus, and that's what truth does.

Another difference we see in Jesus' Kingdom compared to Pilate's, and, actually, between Jesus and all the kingdoms of men, is that as a King, Jesus is...

2. **Dignified**, not **indignant**.

Watch for the difference between Jesus and Pilate in this part of the exchange: we are told that Pilate went back into the palace and had a conversation with Jesus.

(Pilate) asked him, "Where do you come from?" But Jesus did not answer. Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Remember, I have the authority to set you free and also to have you crucified." (John 19:9-10, gnb)

Jesus didn't answer Pilate's question, and it's kind of difficult for us to understand that. We think he should have defended himself. So why didn't he answer? Because Jesus refused to answer selfish and manipulative questions. He won't answer questions that are asked out of selfishness or with some intent to twist his words and betray him – which is what Pilate's motives were, and Jesus' dignified silence *really* irritated Pilate. Pilate said literally, "To ME you are not speaking? Don't you know how important I am?"

Whenever you see a leader or an authority who gets indignant and defensive about their authority, or gets angry if they feel their power is being questioned, then you know you've got a Pilate type of leader. But Jesus remained silent. He didn't need to answer every question; he would only answer those that were genuinely asked. And he will answer you, when you ask sincerely and honestly.

Jesus is a king of Truth and dignity, and third, Jesus' kingship is...

3. **Prophetic**, not **political**.

(John 18:31-32, 19:14-15)

Jesus' kingship is prophetic; it is established by the Word of God Himself and verified by the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies about him. This is different than authority established by popular opinion, which is what politics is really about.

Some of those prophetic statements about Jesus were about the kind of death that Jesus would die. Jesus, the God of Life, would suffer death for us. But it wasn't prophesied as just *any* death—it had to be a *crucifixion*. That's pretty specific, especially since those prophecies were 700 years *before* Jesus was born. Get this: the prophecies about Jesus being crucified were given *100 years before crucifixion was even invented!*

It's amazing how that played out for the prophecy to be fulfilled. Watch this: remember that the Jews weren't allowed by Roman law to kill someone. But – if they could, Scripture spells out very clearly that the only way they could do it was by stoning—throwing stones at someone until they died (Leviticus 24:16). But the Romans, who were in power, refused to allow the Jews to carry out capital punishment. So if Jesus was going to be killed, it would have to be carried out by the Romans, and the way the Romans carried out capital punishment at that time was by crucifixion, and *that* would fulfill prophecy – not politics.

Today, so much of leadership is driven by popular opinion. Elections reports in the news are always about what people say in the polls. Now that we're a year out of the next election, we are hearing about the latest approval ratings of candidates. When it came to Jesus, here's what the people of his time said in the polls:

"It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, "Here is your king!" They shouted back, "Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "The only king we have is the Emperor!" (John 19:14-15, niv)

That may have been the popular opinion of those Jews, but remember it was sheer blasphemy for them to say that.

So because ***Jesus' rule is established and proven by prophecies in Scripture and not by politics, his kingdom will last forever and will never be swayed by peoples' fickle opinions.***

Jesus' kingship is Truth, is dignified, and is prophetic. Fourth, his Kingship is...

4. Affirmed, not asserted.

Politicians and dictators assert whatever authority they wish they had, as opposed to Jesus, who simply affirms his kingly authority. Jesus doesn't have to assert anything. Pilate was very busy asserting his leadership in the face of Jesus' calm affirmation of it. When Jesus wouldn't answer Pilate's questions, Pilate, trying to assert his leadership, said:

"You won't talk? Don't you know that I have the authority to pardon you, and the authority to-- crucify you?" Jesus said, "You haven't a shred of authority over me except what has been given you from heaven." (John 19:10-11, the Message)

Pilate is like the ant saying to the elephant, "Step aside or I'll squash you with my foot." It is *not* going to happen! That's the difference between affirmed and asserted leadership.

Pilate hits close to home with what *all* humans do—we think our lives are our own kingdom with ourselves as the king. We assert our own kingship. This is the reason we are separated from God and his love, because calling ourselves king is called "sin." Anytime we

assert our own will to do what we want instead of what God desires, we are sinning. Imagine the audacity of calling ourselves king of our lives, in the face of the sovereign God, Ruler of all he has created and Father of the King of Kings. Sin is simply asserting our own authority instead of affirming Jesus', regarding ourselves in our minds as "His Excellency" or "Her Majesty." But that leads to death. Choose instead to follow King Jesus! Colossians 1:13 says:

"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." (Colossians 1:13, niv)

There is something else that is really interesting about Jesus' kingship as opposed to Pilate's, and that is that it's based on...

5. ***Sacrifice***, not ***sedition***.

Jesus was being *accused* of sedition; that was the only way the religious leaders could get Jesus crucified – by getting him convicted of treason. Pilate was afraid that a sedition would cost him his job as governor. But according to this passage, ***Jesus established his rule by his sacrifice of himself, not by some seditious act that would violently overthrow Rome. The violence wasn't carried out by Jesus; it was carried out against him.*** His sacrifice was part of His truth, his dignity, the prophecy, and his authority over life and death. And he sacrificed himself for sinners—for me and you, so that he could be *your* King.

One of the most powerful funerals I've ever been at was for a friend of mine. Connie had been diagnosed with Leukemia three years prior. She went through a bone marrow transplant, and it appeared that she was approaching remission. Then we got a call from Larry, Connie's husband, saying that her cancer had come back, and that she had only days to live. But then miraculously, her cancer literally *disappeared*. Connie didn't die of the cancer, she eventually died of the ravages of the treatment. But she ended up with five more miraculous months to live, and she was determined to use every day she had to introduce others to Jesus, especially her cancer doctor, who was Jewish. In one of Connie's last conversations, she talked about how grateful she was for more days to live here and tell others about Jesus. But, then she said amazingly: "If it meant that others would come to know Christ, I am willing to die." Friends, *that* is the Kingdom of Sacrifice. That is what the citizens of Christ's Kingdom do. That is what King Jesus did for you. That is Christ's kingdom. It's a kind of love that willingly sacrifices itself for others.

It is a Kingdom of...

6. ***Love***, not ***Law***.

(John 18:28 vs. 33)

I want you to see the difference between law and love. Remember that the Pharisees would *not* go into the Governor's palace – remember – for fear of being made unclean? Don't you find it interesting that they are worried about picking up a ritually unclean bug, *while plotting to carry out murder*? Compare that to Jesus, whose kingdom is about love: look at verse 33:

Pilate went back into the palace and called for Jesus. He said, "Are you the 'King of the Jews'?" (John 18:33, niv)

Where did Pilate go? *Into* the palace. And where did Jesus Go? Jesus *went into the palace without hesitation*, and they had a conversation together. Sinful things don't make Jesus unclean; Jesus makes all things clean. Jesus' love was not worried about the law making him unclean; Jesus' love was concerned about the soul of the man who was about to crucify him, because that man just might respond to the Good News of God's love. ***Jesus is willing to go anywhere you are in order to let you know the truth of God's love for you***, too. It doesn't matter how "unclean" your life is, or even what your attitude about Jesus is. He wants you to know what he's done for you on the cross, and how much God loves you.

So the last thing about Jesus' Kingdom is that he is a...

7. ***King, not king***

(John 19:19-22)

(That's a capital K and not a lower-case K; Jesus is the King of kings.) Let's look one last time at what the story tells us. Because Pilate, in trying to ridicule Jesus' kingship, actually ended up proclaiming it:

"He went out, carrying his cross, and came to "The Place of the Skull," as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called "Golgotha.") There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," is what he wrote. Many people read it, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city. The notice was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The chief priests said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am the King of the Jews.' " Pilate answered, "What I have written stays written." (John 19:17-22, gnt)

Why did Pilate hang up that sign? He was trying to ridicule Jesus and to offend the chief priests who were manipulating him earlier. But what was written is actually the Truth. It was written in three languages – all the known languages of the Roman kingdom. Jesus is a capital "K" King of all the world, not a small "K" king. The question is, will you accept him as your king? Will you announce Him as King in your life? Jesus is a King of *the* Truth, his is a dignified kingship, one that is prophetically affirmed by his sacrifice of his life for you, a Kingdom of Love. Are you living in a "kingdom of me" – where you are the king of your life, or will you ask Jesus to be King, with a capital "K"?

Prayer

Communion:

You do not have to be a member of this church have communion with us. If you are worshipping with our online community, get your bread and juice ready.

I'd like to ask the ushers to begin passing out the elements. Please hold them until we can receive them together.

You don't have to be a member of this church; in fact, you don't even have to be a Christian. If you're not a Christian, this will have no spiritual reality for you; it will just be a little piece of bread and some warm juice. But, who knows – Jesus may use this to reveal to you what he did for you through his broken body and shed blood on the cross. We call this *a means of grace* – which means that it is a means or a method through which God can reveal his grace to us in a deeper way. Maybe for you, it's for the first time so that you'll receive it.

For believers in Jesus who participate in this holy sacrament, you are declaring that Jesus Christ gave his life for you; allowing himself to be crucified for you, in your place. You are declaring that he is the King of your life.

In the words of the Apostle Paul:

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” (*eat the bread*) In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (*drink the cup*) For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Prayer of committal and thanksgiving.

We thank you, our Father, for the life you have made known to us by Jesus your Son, our King, by whom you made all things, and through whom you take care of the whole world. You sent him to become man for our salvation. You allowed him to suffer and to die. You raised him up, glorified him, and have set him at your right hand, and in Him, you have promised us the resurrection of the dead. His Kingship is one truth, as he is the Truth, he is dignified, prophesied, and affirmed in his authority. His sacrifice for us, of which we have just received, was wholly out of his love for us. Jesus, you are our king.

O Lord Almighty, eternal God, we thank you for the precious blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for us and His precious body. Our Father, may we leave this place with our lives under the Kingship of your Son, Jesus Christ, proclaiming his Kingdom of love to everyone. It is in his name we pray, amen.²

Pastor Roger benediction:

“Now to the king of the ages, to the immortal, invisible, and only God, may honor and glory be given to him forever and always! Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:16, ceb)

² Adapted from www.christianity.com/wiki/prayer/holy-communion-prayer-blessings-of-the-eucharist.html