The Compass

Red Hill Lutheran Church

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
On Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Hope is Here!"
"Serving the King." Text(s): Various Texts.

☐ **Day #1—Monday, November 23rd. Read: John 18.33; Acts 28.23-31. –Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

In the liturgical, Church Year calendar, yesterday was "Christ the King Sunday." Christ the King Sunday is the "transition" Sunday from the season of Pentecost/Ordinary Time to the season of Advent. As we prepare for the season of Advent, we begin with what the Advent season points to…Jesus is our King!

Kingdoms have a *ruler*, a *reign*, and a *realm*. Adam and Eve were created to live interdependently with God and one another and to trust God day by day. The divine design is this: God is the *Ruler;* the world is where God *reigns*; and the *realm* is people's hearts. However, the fall of humankind led humanity to seek dominion in all of existence and to place humans in the place of God. Consequently, life has become filled with the pursuit of power, prestige, and possessions—all in an effort to fill the place in our hearts where God should be.

Jesus' mission, and consequently the mission of the church, is to proclaim that God has come to restore fallen humanity under the reign of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus described this mission as the arrival of the "Kingdom of God." The "Kingdom of God" describes any type of rulership that God may assert over human lives at any time. Dallas Willard defines the Kingdom of God as: "The range and scope of God's effective will, where what God wants done is done." Our choice—daily—is to choose *whom we will serve*. The Kingdom of God or the kingdoms of this world.

Pilate's question asking Jesus if He was King of the Jews is recorded by each of the Gospel writers. As Roman governor, Pilate would certainly be interested in the claims of any would-be king. Messianic expectations always ran high at Passover season, and it would be easy for a Jewish pretender to incite the people into a riot or a rebellion against Rome—hence Pilate's question about Christ's kingship.

Additionally, the notion of Jesus' kingship was likely suggested to Pilate by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high-court, in order to pressure Pilate to condemn Jesus. Consequently, Pilate's question in *v. 33* should be understood to mean, "Do you claim to be the king of the Jews" (As your Jewish leaders claim)? However, Jesus made clear that His concept of kingship differed from Pilate's. If Jesus' *kingdom* were really a threat to the empire, surely Jesus would have organized a revolt. The words translated "*from another place"* (*v.36*) means literally, "not from here." The sense is clear; Jesus' kingship was of a different order from this world's kingdoms.

Going Deeper: *Joshua 24:15*.

Consider/Reflect: Is the kingdom of God a reality in your life right now?

☐ **Day #2—Tuesday, November 24th. Read: John 18.34.—Examine: The Text and its Message.**

Jesus added a question of His own: "*Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?*" What was Jesus really asking? "What kind of a king do you have in mind? A Roman king or a Jewish king? A political king or a spiritual king?" Jesus was not evading the issue; He was forcing Pilate to clarify the matter *for his own sake.* After all, in reality, it was not Jesus that was on trial, it was Pilate! If Pilate had a Roman king in mind, then Jesus could be considered a rebel. If the governor was thinking about a Jewish kind of king, then political matters could be set aside.

It is interesting that Pilate called Jesus "king" at least four times during the trial, and even used that title for the placard he hung on the cross (See also *John 18.39; 19.3, 14–15, 19*).

> The Kingdom of God is not an action taken by humankind or a realm that we establish. The Kingdom is a divine act, not a human accomplishment…Humankind may enter the kingdom (see Luke 16:16) or receive it as a gift (see Luke 12:32). Consequently, the message of the kingdom is the good news…The work of Jesus is a sign of the coming and the presence of the kingdom…The kingdom of God is characterized by grace (see Matthew 20:1-16) and a compassion that binds up the brokenhearted.[1]

Consider/Reflect: Meditate on any of the Scripture passages above. Do you consider God's control over you a blessing or a burden? Why or why not?

☐ Day #3—Wednesday, November 25th. Read: John 18:35-36; Deuteronomy 3:23-29.–Explore: The background to this text(s).

Pilate's reply to Jesus showed what the Romans thought of the Jews: "Am I a Jew?" No doubt there was an obvious note of disdain and sarcasm in Pilate's voice. Jesus was not a prisoner because Pilate had arrested him, but because His own nation's leaders had arrested Him! Where there is smoke there must be fire; so Pilate asked, "What have you done?"

Graciously, Jesus consented to explain Himself and His Kingdom. Yes, He admitted that He is a King; but His kingdom (reign) does not come from the authority of the world. The Jews were under Roman authority, and Pilate was under the authority of the emperor; but Jesus derived His authority from God. His Kingdom is spiritual, it rules in the hearts of His followers; and He does not depend on worldly or fleshly means to advance His cause. If His Kingdom were from the world, by now His followers would have assembled an army and fought to release Him.

Jesus did not say that He had no kingdom in this world, or that He would never rule on earth. He does have a kingdom in this world—wherever there are people who have trusted Him and yielded to His sovereignty. One day He shall return and establish a righteous kingdom on earth (*Daniel 7.13–28*). Pilate's concern was the source of this kingdom: where did Jesus derive His authority?

God desires to reveal to you the divine nature and the quality of a relationship that God desires to have with you: to be your God, to be your KING! This is not so that you may control or "use" God, but that you may know how much you are loved by God and how God wants to be *with you and empower you!*

> Going Deeper: *John 14.21.*

Consider/Reflect: "Pilate displays irritation for being drawn into what he perceived as a Jewish squabble motivated by jealousy of Jesus' public ministry…Jesus was rejecting any worldly political aspirations or rebellious intent. Although a King, His kingdom did not threaten the external rule of the Roman Empire (cf Lk 20:25)."[2]

☐ Day #4--Thursday, November 26th. Read: Psalm 89.5-8; John 13.35.—Explore: The background to this text(s).

Today is Thanksgiving. As a country, we thank God for ALL of His good gifts to us! In gratitude to God, we are to use our lives as an offering of praise. An "attitude of gratitude" changes the way we view life in this world. As Christians, we are blessed to be a blessing for others! This is the heart of Biblical stewardship. As you read Psalm 89.5-8, I encourage you to read it out loud (or silently) as a prayer. Consider…

> What are we living for? What are our ambitions? Jesus urges His disciples to live for God.
>
> It is important to have our true wealth in heaven, where there is no decay or loss (6:19–24). Jesus has already spoken of the wonderful rewards that await us. God will bless us beyond anything we have earned or deserved by our little acts of loyalty and obedience to him. It's important to be clear about this. Just as good eyes enable us to see well, so a good heart will enable us to live well…Money is attractive to us. It makes us feel good because it gives power and choice. But the desire for money can take us over, and we end up worshipping it as our god….Jesus tells us straight. We can only worship God *or* money. There isn't room in our lives for both.[3]

1 Neil T. Anderson. *The Daily Discipler* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2005).
2 *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).
3 A. Knowles. *The Bible Guide* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 2001).

Consider/Reflect: Prayer: What are your thoughts about the paragraph above? What convicts you? What comforts you? Pray about those thoughts, convictions, and comforts today. On this Thanksgiving Day we thank God for all of His blessings in our lives!

☐ **Day #5— Friday, November 27th. Read: Acts 20.13-19.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**
We conclude our brief series on the mission and work of the church this week, specifically exploring our vocation as servants of Jesus and one another. Our Epistle lesson last Sunday was from *Acts 20*, revealing to us the early days of the Christian mission. Our purpose as a church is similar to the purpose of the early church. To: "Know Christ. Make Christ Known."

The author of the book of Acts is the Gospel writer Luke (The book of Acts is really volume 2 of Luke's history of Jesus' mission; volume 1 being the Gospel of Luke). In Acts, Luke records eight messages given by the Apostle Paul to various groups: a Jewish synagogue congregation (Acts 13:14–43); Gentiles *(Acts 14:14–18; 17:22–34*); church leaders (*Acts 20:17–38*); a Jewish mob (*Acts 22:1–21*); the Jewish council (*Acts 23:1–10*); and various government officials (*Acts 24:10–21; 26:1–32*). Paul's address to the Ephesian elders (beginning at *v.13*) is unique in that it reveals Paul's heart as a pastor. This message from Paul the pastor enables us to get a glimpse of how Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years.

Paul chose to walk from Troas to Assos, a distance of about twenty miles. Why? For one thing, it enabled him to stay longer with the Christians in the city of Troas while he sent Luke and the rest on ahead (*Acts 20:13*). It would take a ship at least a day to sail from Troas to Assos; Paul could probably walk it in about ten hours (maybe a little less). In addition, I think it is very possible that Paul wanted time alone to pray and seek the Lord about his trip to Jerusalem. Paul must have had a sense of the challenges and threats ahead of him. He may also have been considering the message he would give to the leaders in Ephesus. Finally, (and totally assumed) he may have desired the exercise! (?) When you are under an immense amount of pressure, physical exercise helps to reduce the stress (Again, just my opinion ☺)

Paul was very honest and very clear about the dangers and challenges that the church (and Christians) will face when the church brings the Gospel to the surrounding culture. However, like Paul, the church was to boldly and courageously preach the gospel and live in obedience to Jesus. Paul himself would be an example of this kind of lifestyle. After all, Paul was an ambassador and not a diplomat! The motivation for Paul's ministry is found in the phrase, "serving the Lord" (*Acts 20:19*). He was not interested in making money (*Acts 20:33*) or in enjoying an easy life (*Acts 20:34–35; Acts 20:24; Romans 1:1*). Paul wanted Jesus proclaimed and known! (*1 Thessalonians 2:1–13*. This was his service to the Lord!)

Consider/Reflect: Like Paul, *you* are an ambassador for Jesus! Ambassadors represent the leader of a government in a foreign land. Ambassadors work through embassies in the foreign land. Similarly, the church is an "embassy" for the Kingdom of God in the world. As a Christian, an ambassador for the Kingdom of God, you represent our leader, Jesus, and help the plan of God to be carried out in this "foreign land" of contemporary culture. How we live is meant to be a reflection of our true citizenship in God's Kingdom. Consider today: How do you represent your "native country?"

☐ **Day #6-Saturday, November 28th. Read: Acts 20.20-25. —Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**
In *v.22* the phrase, "*And now, constrained by the Spirit*" shifts the emphasis from the past to the present as Paul opens his heart and tells his friends just how he feels. He did not hide from them the fact that he was bound for Jerusalem (*Acts 19:21*), even though he knew that danger and possible death awaited him there. The Holy Spirit had given him this message in city after city. Paul could have said, "This is too dangerous, surely God does not want anything to happen to me?" but, of course, he did not—he continued on. Paul was too gripped by his calling and his devotion to Jesus Christ to look for some safe and easy way out. Paul would not quit but would go to Jerusalem to die for Jesus Christ if necessary. No threat, fear, or misfortune would inhibit Paul from his divinely appointed mission for Jesus!

Notes:

(v.20): Paul's ministry from house to house (See *Acts 2:46*) is contrasted with his public ministry and probably refers to house churches. If so, each elder (pastor) was possibly the overseer of a house church. Paul both preached and taught.

(v.21): In the Greek, the words *repentance* and *faith* are joined together by one article. This may imply that these two words stress two aspects of trust in Christ (*Acts 2:38*). When a person places his faith in Christ, he/she is then turning from (repenting of) his/her former unbelief. This is the same message for both Jews and Greeks (i.e., Gentiles; *Acts 19:10; Galatians 3:28*).

(v. 22): Here Paul began to describe present circumstances (*vs. 22-27*). The words, "constrained by the Spirit," are literally, "bound in the Spirit" (*dedemenos … tō pneumati*). Probably this refers to the Holy Spirit's guidance in the apostle's life (*Luke 2:27; 4:1; Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 16:6-7*). Paul's reason for going to Jerusalem, though not stated, evidently was to take the offering from other churches to the poor saints in Jerusalem (*Acts 24:17; 21:12-14*).

(v. 23): Already, Paul had been warned by the Holy Spirit—that is, evidently by people with the Spirit-given gift of prophecy—that prison and hardships awaited him in Jerusalem. He anticipated troubles in Jerusalem when he wrote *Romans 15:30-31*. Yet he was determined to go there (*Acts 19:21; 20:16*).

(Vs. 24-25): When these verses are read together, it becomes clear that the preaching of the kingdom and the gospel of God's grace are related. God's work of grace enables believing Gentiles to have both the privilege of salvation and of entering the Lord's community—the church and the Kingdom of God itself.[4]

Consider/Reflect: "Paul's farewell address to the Church leaders of Ephesus emphasizes the significance of the work of the ministry. We are often inclined more toward receiving than giving. Jesus has given—and still gives—temporal and eternal blessings, so we likewise are to give of ourselves to others. Yet, we can never out-give our generous Savior. [Pray]: 'Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee…Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee.' Amen. (Lutheran Service Book 783:1, 6)"[5]

Pray and Prepare for Worship Tomorrow…
Advent and Christmas Sermon Series Begins: "Hope is Born."
Scripture Texts:
Isaiah 64.1-9
1 Corinthians 1.3-9
Mark 13.24-37

4 J.F. Walvoord, R.B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983).
5 *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).