

Readings: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 93, Revelation 1:4b-8, John 18:33-37

“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not from this world...Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” John 18:36-37

As the season of Ordinary Time in our church calendar draws to a close, we’re celebrating Christ as our King. We began Ordinary Time with the Gospel of John, in which John said:

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

So, it’s fitting that in ending this season, we return to the Gospel of John and focus our attention on Jesus Christ as we celebrate Christ the King.

Pope Pius XI established the “The Feast of Christ the King” in 1925. That was seven years after the end of World War I, when there had been horrific suffering, loss of life, and economic hardship. Many Christians had begun to doubt that Christ existed. In the chaos and disruption following the war, ruthless dictators were rising to power in Europe. Pope Pius hoped that Christians would gain strength and courage by celebrating the reign of Christ in the world and in their lives.ⁱ

In many ways, our lives today are similar. There has been tremendous pain and suffering as millions of people around the world have died of COVID. There is growing conflict and division among countries and within countries, including our own. Political movements are gaining power by dividing people and stoking people’s anger and fear. As people’s frustration has grown, too many people are resorting to violence to try to change the world into the way they want it to be.

People are longing for hope, healing, and peace. Perhaps more than ever, we need to focus on the hope, healing, and peace that Jesus brings. We celebrate Christ the King Sunday today before the beginning of Advent in one week. During Advent we celebrate the birth of Jesus as the newborn King and anticipate the second coming of Christ.

To our modern ears, the word “king” can sound dated and irrelevant. It’s helpful to understand the unique way in which kings and their authority were understood in the Old Testament and ancient Judaism. The image of a shepherd was used to describe kings. God was viewed as a compassionate and caring shepherd, who protected and guided his sheep, the people of Israel. In the Old Testament, to have power over others meant that it must be used for the benefit of those with the least power. In

ancient Israel and throughout the ancient Near East, the king was judged by how well he cared for the widow or orphan.ⁱⁱ The political rulers at the time of Jesus and the rule of the Roman Empire were the opposite of this; they were oppressing and exploiting the Jewish people.

In our Gospel reading today, we hear an exchange between Pontius Pilate and Jesus. In this exchange we see two markedly different understandings of power and authority. Pontius Pilate as the Roman governor had secular and political power and authority. He was only interested in protecting his own power and defending the mighty power of the Roman Empire. Jesus has divine authority as the son of God and dedicated his life and ministry to establishing God's kingdom on Earth.

Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Jn 18:33) He wanted to know if Jesus was considered by the people to be the political leader of the Jewish people. Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world...my kingdom is not from here." (Jn. 13:36) Jesus's kingdom is not geographically limited to a certain place, or even a certain people.ⁱⁱⁱ

Pilate persisted in questioning Jesus' because Jesus' growing influence was a threat to the power and authority of Pilate and the Roman Emperor. Pilate asked Jesus, "So you are king?" Jesus said, "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." (Jn. 18:37) Jesus was speaking truth to power in this exchange with Pilate.

One of the ancient names for Satan is "the Prince of Lies." This brings to mind a famous painting from the 1800s by the German painter Friedrich Retzsch. The painting depicts a chess game being played by Satan and Faust. In Johann Wolfgang van Goethe's famous play, Faust, Mephistopheles is the chief devil. Faust is a man who wants to learn all that is possible to learn. Mephistopheles bet God that Faust could be lured away from a righteous and honorable life.

The title of the painting is "One More Move." I'm not a chess player, but I've been told that at first glance it looks like the devil is winning because he has checked the King. But if you study the chess pieces carefully you will realize that the King has one more move. I love this idea. To me it symbolizes that Jesus, our King, always has one more move to defeat Satan, the Prince of Lies.

Sadly, we are living in a time when no one seems to protest when lies are told by politicians, corporate leaders, and others who tell lies to protect their power, status, and wealth. I'm comforted in knowing that no matter what happens, Jesus, our King, always has one more move that can save us and free us to live the life that God wants us to live.

Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:6) The truth that Jesus represents and teaches us is that God loves each of us. Jesus knows that each of us is created in God’s image and we’re called to live into that reality and to reflect God’s love in all that we think, say and do. If we do this, we can bring love and hope into our broken world. If we follow the Way of Jesus, we can bring Christ’s healing touch to those who are suffering and those who feel abandoned and unloved.

Our hope is grounded in the knowledge that God continues to love us and all others. No one is invisible to God or exempt from God’s love, mercy, grace, and compassion. In entering the holy season of Advent next Sunday with the light of the Advent candles, we can find hope in knowing that Christ is our king who brings light into our world. And it is through Christ’s presence in our hearts, minds, and souls that we in turn can bring hope and Christ’s light to others in our world. AMEN.

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ⁱ “Christ the King Sunday,” <http://www.churchyear.net/ctksunday.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, After Pentecost 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 157.

ⁱⁱⁱ “The Reign of Truth,” https://www.episcopalcafe.com/reign-of-truth/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=the-weekly_5