

“Grace to you and peace from Christ
who is and who was and
who is to come.” AMEN!

I am not sure why it never occurred to me before
but in my preparations for today, on
this festival day called
Christ the King Sunday,

I noticed that Jesus never
wanted to be called “king.”

Earlier in John, when Jesus realized that
the people were about to come and
make him king, he fled into
the mountains by himself.

In other places, Jesus did his best
to silence his disciples from using titles
like Messiah or “the Christ.”

Then, in a final act of mockery, Pilate
put the inscription over Jesus’ head on the cross:
The king of the Jews.

Now in today’s gospel, where Jesus and
Pilate entered into conversation
for the first time, we find Pilate

projecting king-ship on Jesus and Jesus,
as always, deflecting the title.

I realized, Jesus was quite ambivalent
about being called “King.”

And here is yet another instance, where we
might not get what and who Jesus was
because we also desire to put
the “king” title upon Him.

The word “king” is a loaded word.

It is used to persuade belief and can
sometimes be described as rhetoric that
is used as a sort of brainwashing.

“Christ the King” Sunday or some call it
“Reign of Christ” Sunday comes from
imperial origins that date back to
around 1925.

It was created not very long ago,
when Pope Pius XI instituted
the Christ the King observance
because “followers of Christ were
being lured away by the
increasing secularism of the world.”

While most of us will not argue that
many in our society lift up and give far
too much attention and devotion to
things other than God

we might also want to be careful that
the 20th Century creation of
“Christ the King” Sunday does not fool us
to think we can fully define Jesus.

A good question to keep in mind is
“why are we so hell-bent on making Jesus King?”

If he avoided the title every time,
why do Christians push so hard for it? (Pause)

Well, before we dive into that answer let’s also
look at the underlying “doom and gloom” of
this season’s Biblical texts.

Realizing that we live in this
time of fear and despair.

Today’s world feels quite apocalyptic when
we encounter the progression of climate change,
witness the lack of trust in government,

and a society that is turning in on itself
and ripping apart communities.

What if Christians, instead of ramming
“Christ the King” down everyone’s throat
we took perhaps a different view of
this passage and simply see Jesus
responding to a person
with societal power?

Are we, like Pilate, are so engrossed
with keeping power that in our hunt to control
the conversation we don’t even
recognize Jesus’ introduction of

a set of values that are very different
from the dominant society’s values?

How often do I forfeit Jesus’ “upside down”
value system in order to remain safe and secure
in the power that comes from empire?

Probably more often than we’d like to admit. (Pause)

This week, as we encounter the final
Sunday of the church year, we find
quite simply Jesus speaking
directly to power.

We might even sense how Pilate bristled at
the fact that no matter what Pilate did,
he couldn’t control the discourse.

Pilate bristled because powerful people
hate it when they cannot control the policy
and the discourse surrounding them.

So, we might even recognize that Jesus exerted
authority in ways that did not include
military power or intimidation.

This is the way the world's
kings/queens/ruling authorities
exert authority.

But - Jesus, a marginalized individual, simply
asked questions to Pilate and called him out
(albeit in subtle ways) for
faking sincerity to justice.

Pilate asked his question under the guise that
he was simply asking for others,
looking for answers as if an impartial judge.

Yet, his question was full of biases. (Pause)

Liberation theologian, Samuel Cruz wrote
that “a modern day example
[of Pilates loaded and biased question]
would be one where police officers ask
a group of young black and brown

men on a street corner,
“What are you doing?”

That question is neither neutral nor innocent.

The racist ideas about black and
brown people come into play.”

“Are you the king of the Jews,” is a
question loaded with tons of bias.

When Jesus responded to Pilate not with
an answer but a question for him to answer
a sensitive person can feel
the bristle on Pilates ego.

“I am not a Jew, am I?”

Pilate wants to act like he’s innocent of
prejudice toward Jesus and he will pretend
he’s free from corruption by playing along
with the lies from his constituents,
but Jesus will not fall for that.

For that kind of behavior is the behavior and
belief of this world.

That power and authority come from money,
intimidation, lies, blaming of others, and

military might.

Yet, for Jesus - power and authority comes
from pointing to the source of hope and
promise that comes from God in servant form.

Pilate, the temple authority, and the angry mob
get power from their abuses and Jesus gets
his from a “kingdom not of this world.”

But, listen, this doesn't necessarily mean
that Jesus is only referring to
a kingdom somewhere in heaven and
one that is not relevant to this world.

Jesus simply spoke to the
world power broker, Pilate, and said
that the values of his “kingdom” are
different from the values of
the current system.

The type of authority that the world exercises is
one that leads to corruption, oppression and
the kind of hypocrisy that Pilate hid behind
while speaking with Jesus.

And just because Pilate didn't get it
doesn't mean we can't.

So many Christians misunderstand Jesus
because they want to take him in order
for them to be powerful and controlling.

Too many Christians want to take Jesus in order
to exercise an authoritarian type of power
over other people.

In other words, to make Jesus “king” in order
to defeat their enemies in war.

This is why so many push a “kingly” Christ.

Beloved, Jesus will not fall for that.

Jesus’ upside down values
communicates power through
humility and service.

Power on the back of a donkey
not by riding with weapons on a chariot.

A “king” who is killed by those with
societal and religious power,

but here’s the thing, by allowing that to happen
we are given the ultimate demonstration of
the power of love.

This is the truth that Jesus spoke....
and God's values revealed.

This is the truth that Jesus is, was, and
the truth that is to come.

This is the truth that the cross reminds us.

“That in the words of Jurgen Moltmann,
‘our Christian faith has a God that was crucified.’”
(Pause)

In conclusion, theologian Barbara Rossing wrote
how “the Jewish tradition marks the end of
the yearly Torah cycle with a wonderful
holiday of Simchat Torah,
“Joy in the Torah.”

That celebration includes a time of taking out
the huge Torah scrolls from the ark and
dancing with them.

I wish that we had a tradition like that for our
year end celebration.

Something that focused more on joy of dancing
with the scriptures rather than kingship,
dominion, triumphalism and judgment.”

O Christ, what can it mean for us to dance
with your Holy Word?

To know that you are a different kind of king.

And to see how that word fails to define you.

We know how your message and word and name
have been used to promote racism and
evil powers in the world.

You won't fall for that and neither will we.

We dance knowing you show the
different ways of God's truth.

We dance knowing how truth is a
person and a relationship with God
and that we make sure this truth
continues to pour out through each of us.

Jesus' voice of truth calls us to serve and dance with
a different kind of king.

AMEN!