

**Gospel & Sermon November 24, 2024**  
**Christ the King Sunday**  
**Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone**  
**“A different kind of king.”**



*In our gospel this week, Pilate knows how kings and kingdoms, emperors and empires work. So do we. Their work is the work of conquest...but Jesus is a different kind of king. He's not “that” kind of king. But can he make his meaning clear – without a sword?*

**Gospel: John 18:33-37**

*In John's gospel, the story of Jesus and Pilate presents two different ways of exercising power: through force or with love.*

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be

fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. 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.”

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**“A different kind of king.”**

Jesus is a different kind of king. His kingdom is not from here. What does that even mean? You’d think Pilate would ask. But really all Pilate wants to know is whether Jesus poses a serious threat. Because Pilate has aspirations.

Pilate served under the emperor Tiberius as governor of the Roman province of Judea. Assignment to this backwater region was probably not his dream job. But if he couldn’t keep the peace here in Judea, it would be his last job. So what he really wants to know is this: Is Jesus an insurrectionist, some kind of revolutionary? Is Jesus threatening a rebellion that Rome will have to put down?

Pilate knows how kings and kingdoms, emperors and empires work. So do we. Their work is the work of conquest.

If you’ve ever played the board game Risk, you’ve played the game of empire. Risk was created by a French filmmaker, and when it was first released in 1957, it was called “The Conquest of the World.” Parker Brothers renamed it “Risk” in 1959. The board features a map of the world, and the goal is to eliminate your opponents and occupy every territory.

Players strategize for global domination. They build armies and launch attacks. They make and break alliances in order to capture more and more territory.

That’s the game Rome was playing. Over hundreds of years, Rome grew into an empire by conquering its neighbors, and their neighbors, and expanding its control around the Mediterranean, extending to parts of modern-day Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

By the time Jesus was on trial before Pilate, oppressive Roman taxes had forced most people in Judea into poverty. Roman soldiers were everywhere, making clear that Judea was a conquered land. Jews were allowed to practice their religion - but not in any way that challenged the empire.

And remember, the Jewish people had a history of prophets who challenged the rulers of their day, exposing injustice and oppression - and preaching about the consequences. So Pilate wants to know: Is this Jesus a threat to the empire?

Jesus is a revolutionary. And he is a king. But he is a revolutionary and king in a way that Pilate cannot grasp. When Pilate asks: "What have you done?" Jesus simply replies, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Pilate cannot fathom that there could possibly be some kind of empire or kingdom bigger than Rome, mightier than Rome - somehow above and beyond Rome. But Pilate misunderstands what kind of king Jesus is. He misunderstands what kind of kingdom Jesus is talking about. Sometimes, so do we. Because Jesus' kingdom is like nothing we've ever experienced.

Or at least like nothing we've ever experienced fully. Because we have witnessed it. Jesus has shown us what his kingdom looks like - and how much it differs from the kingdoms of this world. If Jesus' kingdom were of this world, his followers would be fighting for him, he tells Pilate. If Jesus' kingdom were of this world, he would have armed them and commanded a revolt. That's what kings and emperors and other earthly rulers do.

But just the previous night, Jesus had ordered one of his disciples to lay down his arms. When religious leaders and Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Simon Peter drew his sword, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his ear. But instead of calling the others to battle, Jesus turns to Peter and says: Put your sword away.

Jesus' kingdom is not about violence. After Jesus fed 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two fish, the awestruck crowd wanted to take him by force and make him king. Remember what Jesus did? He withdrew from the crowd to spend some time by himself.

And when the people surrounded Jesus and shouted, “Hosanna! Save us!” as he rode a donkey into Jerusalem, Jesus did not raise up an army to save them. He went to the cross to save the whole world.

Our earthly kingdoms pursue goals like superiority, acquisition and defense of territory, access to and control of resources. The goal of Jesus’ kingdom is love.

“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,” John writes. “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.”

“All peoples, nations and languages,” the prophet Daniel envisions, worshiping and serving Jesus in a kingdom that does not need defending armies because it can never be destroyed. A kingdom that does not need to engage in conquest and acquisition because it encompasses everything that ever was, is, and will be. A kingdom that does not fear death because death’s power has been destroyed. Forever and ever. Amen.

We are waiting for that kingdom. In Jesus, it is here, but it is not fully here.

And that reality, that waiting can tempt us. It can tempt us to divide our loyalty. It can tempt us to give our allegiance to other kings or rulers, other kingdoms and nations.

Christ the King Sunday became a church holiday in 1925 because that’s what was happening in the world. In the aftermath of the Great War, European and American nationalism was on the rise. Christians were forgetting the One whom they ultimately serve. This day reminds us again.

In a world of violence, our king tells his disciples to put away their swords. In a world of self-promotion and self-protection, our king goes willingly to the cross. In a world where we fear death more than almost anything, the end of our lives or the end of life as we know it, our king promises that death is not the end.

On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus prayed for his disciples using these words: “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ... As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

We are sent into the world as citizens of a different kind of kingdom. We are sent into the world God loves not to conquer peoples and territories for Jesus but to love. To humbly serve our neighbors - even our enemies. We follow the example of Jesus, who on the last night of his earthly life humbled himself to wash the feet of his disciples, even those who would betray and deny him.

Jesus' power is revealed in sacrificial love. Pilate can't understand that. It's a losing strategy in a game of Risk. Even today, it doesn't make much sense. That's still not the way the world works.

But we are still called to be in the world in a different way: a way of love and peace. We are called to dedicate our gifts and our lives to the way of Jesus our king. When fear and temptation test our allegiance, in the midst of this world's troubles, we hear Jesus say again: "Take courage: I have conquered the world!"

**Pastor Jaime**

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