

John 18:33-37

Today is the last Sunday in our Church year, and we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Long Live the King!

This was a relatively new addition to the Churches calendar instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI to remind the world that the Church has a right to freedom from other governing bodies and that Christ must ultimately be the one that reigns over all our lives...so how's that been working out for us I wonder?

Think about kingship...We are far removed from what a King is. We don't have them here. In fact our nation was born out of rebelling against a king who was oppressing his people in many ways.

In Africa there are still kings today who are very powerful. But what does that mean. Well first off, you don't get to choose your leaders. Imagine if our leaders were just there – getting to their position by birth alone...and only leaving upon their death?

Second, we really aren't subject to that kind of power here. Kings of old had extreme power over everything in a person's life. We don't know what it is like to be subject to one person with such power over our lives....unless of course you're married (that was a joke)...or a child!

Third, kings are often associated with persecution and oppression. That's how a king stays in power - they have to remain alive. When you are subject to a king, you are subject to executions, loss of property, spouse, life; you name it...especially if you oppose the ideas of the king reigning over your life.

In the history of the world, Kings are typically not remembered as nice... power tends to always corrupt us!

And finally, in ancient times the people who were subject to kings knew that truth wasn't a King's forte. Fake news has always been around. David, Israel's greatest king, was also known for not being too honest when it came to his own desires being met regardless of the cost to others...mmm lying to gain or remain in power...good thing we have evolved past that!

Now anyone knowing these things about kings wouldn't be too excited about having one. At the time of Jesus the Hebrew people were living under a Roman emperor... a king, and the Roman emperors were vicious. It wasn't so good to have a king. And the people had no choice...and the King ultimately chose those people groups who were in or OUT...and they would make it crystal clear who was out...and God help you if you were outside the ruling group!

Now, this idea of kingship was also wrapped up and entangled with divine rights. And the king and his line were always divinely chosen right...of course they were!

Then along comes Jesus, a truly divine King and He stands in direct opposition to all the kings of this world. A king whose kingdom is not born from the ways of THIS world. A king who follows a different set of Guidelines.

For many, these so called kings and their kingdoms did not provide safety, or comfort, or mercy, or relationship...exercising worldly power by man ultimately leads to pain, suffering, death, and despair for many people.

As a king, Jesus chooses us not merely as subjects to serve him, but WE instead are served BY him. Instead of causing oppression and tyranny, this king frees us from those things. Instead of twisting the truth, this king IS the truth. Long live the King! SO What does that mean for us today?

Who is our King – Caesar or God? Who or WHAT rules over our hearts and minds? What do you believe...and more importantly how do you act! For as Jesus says where your treasure is... there your heart lies also.

Pilate tells Jesus "You are a king, then?!" And Jesus turns it around: "You are saying that I am a king." With that statement Jesus is now putting Pilate on trial: "You have said that I am a king... but does Pilate really buy it?"

Does it matter what the truth REALLY is or is truth just what you tend to believe as the truth? Perception is king! What is truth?

From Pilate's point of view - he is in control. Jesus is in on his turf, and his authority is backed by the full might and authority of the Roman Empire...the true King...the divine ruler Cesare...and Pilate...not some Jewish God, holds all the power here...he literally has the power over life and death...not this ragged inconsequential man standing before him!

Do you see how easy it is for us to see things from Pilate's point of view...isn't that's how the REAL world works...So what has power over your life from day to day...What is truth to you? And how do we follow this kinda of king in our hearts. Well I have to be honest, my heart has been troubled lately by all the unfolding events in our world. And it should be troubled!

I worry more for those people whose hearts are not troubled and have become desensitized to the pain and suffering in this world... Having a troubled heart proves you are alive and connected with God and creation.

Systematic Racism, Immigration, Refugees, War...What's your response ...exclusion or inclusion. Fear or love!

I had an interesting conversation with a past co-worker who was against taking refugees into this country. Ironically her parents were refugees from Germany after World War II and were sponsored by another American family. So we talked... and what started as a conversation on opposite sides... soon became one of mutual understanding. She wasn't opposed to "sponsoring" refugees she was opposed to the government taking them in.

Then it dawned on me: both sides of the argument, liberal and conservative just wanted the government to act. But that is the real problem, because it distances you and me from the problem and from the people! No government can legislate love and compassion...that only happens in one's heart.

This country has gotten it wrong many times in the past. With Slavery, Racism and right across the bridge in Philly - which has laws against feeding the homeless right outside of the liberty bell...a country which has always proclaimed liberty... for all peoples.

The statue of liberty - the symbolic entry point into our inclusive country reads:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Author: Emma Lazarus

Ironic isn't it... the homeless are not welcome outside the liberty bell. How appropriate that the author's name is Lazarus meaning *God is my help!* Lazarus is the only person given a name by Jesus in one of His parables. Jesus gave this homeless man a name when he was invisible to all those around him in his life. Yet the rich man in the same story had no name. You see this king knows everyone's name...it's personal.

My old colleague didn't want the government to act; she wanted people to act.

It's easy to say that we have our own homeless and suffering right here. Then do something about it...feed them...learn their names. How are you following our King?

And make no mistake... nothing you do out of love is ever, ever without risk! But that's what will change your heart and that's what will change the world.

Each of us must take responsibility and accountability for acting out against injustice and oppression and for easing the suffering of one another.

And we do this by going out into the world...by learning people's names, by sharing their stories and by making compassion personal.

God doesn't care about governments - they will all come and go. God cares only about each one of our hearts - for THAT is eternal! Our true King knows each of our names!

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, just prior to Jesus' death, Jesus tells his disciples...When the son of man comes in his glory All nations will be gathered before him and he will separate people - one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats...and the KING will say to those favored.

Come... you are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...for I was hungry and you gave me food... I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...I was a stranger and you welcomed me...I was naked and you gave me clothing...I was sick and you took care of me...I was imprisoned and you visited me.

And they will ask the King when did we do all these things...how was it that we served you our king? And the king will answer just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family...you did it to me!

Are you visibly living out your Christian calling...do you serve Christ by serving others. Jesus could have told Pilate anything. What was important is what Pilate believed...and what Pilate then did.

Jesus asks Pilate what do you say about me? That's the real question... isn't it...who do YOU say that Jesus is? What do you believe? ...and the most important aspect of declaring Christ as our King, is not our understanding of who Jesus is... or what Jesus does; but what do we do with this gift we have been given... OUR response is what matters most!

...and who do others say that YOU are? Must you tell them that you follow Jesus...or can they see it for themselves in how you live your life each day... Which kingdom do you serve...which reality do you perceive as truth?

This King gave his servants one command only! To love one another. Just as your King loves you. By this everyone will know that you are His subjects, if you love one another"

How do you imagine the tension between Pilate and Jesus? How do you imagine the very real tension in our own lives today between what the world tells us and what Jesus tells us? Who or what ultimately rules over your life? Caesar or God? The kingdom of America or the Kingdom of Heaven?! We say your will be done...yours is the kingdom the power and the glory not us or me!

Can you imagine what our lives might look like if we lived under the Kingship of Jesus? Could you imagine what the world could become? ...The kingdom of God right here on earth...wholeness and well-being for everyone!

So we Christians have a different kind of King. One who's kingdom is not like this world. One who is not on some distant throne far from His subjects. A king who showers his subjects with free gifts (Grace).

A King who comforts us when the world seems to come crashing down...a King who is with us even in our darkest times...A king who mends broken relationships and broken hearts by making for us something new...A king who brings us joy and peace...a king who brings life... even in the face of suffering and death.

And THIS King loves his subjects so much that He even places them before that of his own life...THIS king is servant of all...and THIS king asks nothing less of US, His subjects...to love and to serve one another (especially the least of these)...for in serving them we will be serving our King!

We don't LOVE to earn God's LOVE - we LOVE to demonstrate it!

May you shine your light boldly into the dark recesses of this world so that others may see the light of Christ in their lives... so that they may also come to know eternal truth!

Long live the King!

...and long live the King in each one of your hearts!

Your faithful servant,
carmen