

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of Holy Eucharist
The Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King; November 25, 2018

“Are You the King?”

Scripture: John 18:33-37; (Proper 29 B, RCL)

[Vignette...]

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” **[Pause]**

Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Cut! Cut! Pontius, baby, we’ve been over this a hundred times. Your line is “Are you the King?” Not “Are you the King of the Jews?” Can we get it right this time? Okay? Thank you... Everybody, quiet! Roll cameras! Pilate enters the headquarters again, summons Jesus, and... Action! “Are you the king... of the Jews?” ...

Cut!!!

You know, I can't help but wonder what it might have meant had Pilate simply asked Jesus if he was “king.” Not just “King of the Jews”, but THE king. The one to whom they all should be listening. The one who could help make things right. The one who could stop suffering and end their endless wars, and bring peace and

prosperity to the people, including Pilate. But there was no way he could ask that question, right? For Pilate, the king was somebody like the emperor, with the boundless power of destruction and death, control of the armies, the ability to suppress his enemies all over the world and take whatever he wanted whenever he wanted it. That was a king... unbridled power to rule one's people and crush one's critics. Including, if he didn't toe the line... Pilate. Or maybe Pilate saw the king as somebody like Herod. You had to watch your back around Herod. He held power in his little corner of the world by being slimy really, completely dishonest, patronizing to the people, willing to turn against his advisors, his friends, even his family whenever it was good for him; murderous, lustful, rich with ill-gotten gain, and just a petty tyrant. For Pilate, *that* was a king. So no wonder he is confused by this humble Jesus sitting before him; no wonder he chooses to keep things a little parochial. *Maybe you think you're a king, Jesus, but maybe you're just a king for these ridiculous Jews. Are you their king? Are you the king of the Jews?*

And then Jesus gives him his chance... "You say that I am a king." *You say it, Pilate. You're the governor. You have the ear of the people... and of Herod, and of the emperor. Tell them that I am a king, and tell them just what kind of king I am. Not the dishonest, power-hungry, oppressive, fear-mongering kings like you know. My kingdom isn't like that. If it were,*

there would be fighting in the streets to get me out of your headquarters. But there isn't. So, tell them I am a king, but tell them what kind of king I really am... Tell them the truth.

Let me ask something of us here this morning... For whom is this story told? Why does John give us the record of this conversation between Jesus and Pilate? Do we think it is only Pilate to whom Jesus is speaking?

Each year on this Last Sunday after Pentecost, this Sunday of Christ the King, we get the chance again to consider just what kind of king we will follow, what kind of king we proclaim. When I hear Jesus say to Pilate, “*You* say that I am a king,” I see him *looking* at me... at us, talking *with* us. *You* say that I am a king...

Okay, but what kind of king is Jesus?...

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.” (Mark 10:14-16)

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these..., you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:38-40)

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)

“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.” (John 18:37)

That’s our king, and he isn’t speaking only with Pilate, you know. No matter how much Pilate may wish that Jesus was only a small time guy in a small time part of the empire called Palestine, Jesus isn’t just “King of the Jews”... for us he is become Christ, *the King*. And he says... *You* say that I am a king. *We* say that he is our king... By the way we live. By the ones in whom we put our trust. By the leaders we choose and follow. By the opportunities we take to serve others. By the way we fashion a world for our kids. By the way we work for peace. By the dignity we offer other

people. I'm not saying it's easy. But it is rather... regal. I'm saying it is why Jesus came into this world... to testify to this living truth. And it is why we are in this world too, to keep on testifying to who is really... THE King.