

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday before Advent. It is also the Feast Day of our church. The gospel today has Jesus arrested and being questioned by Pilate. *Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”* (John 18:33) And Jesus answers, *“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.”* (John 18:36) If Jesus were the type of king that Pilate and even his own disciples expected him to be then his followers would be using violence to help him maintain his power and territory. His followers would see the world as ‘us & them.’ It would be about who has the power. But Jesus firmly denies that type of kingship and power. He first denied that power at the beginning of his ministry, after his baptism. When the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness

*Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”* (Luke 4:5-8) The devil offered Jesus the opportunity to be king, to use his power like an earthly king and Jesus refused it. It is only the will of God that Jesus tells us to serve and that Jesus modeled for us in his own life. Then, *when the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.* (Luke 4:13)

Now before Pilate, Jesus tells Pilate how he could have had his followers fighting to keep him from being handed over to the Jews. But his kingdom is not from this world. Rather Jesus’ kingdom is one that Pilate perceiving power from an earthly perspective can’t even image. Jesus’ kingdom is one of love and compassion. A kingdom that Jesus has told his followers can be entered only as a child. *Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.*” (Mark 10:14) This is so outside the realm of the imagination of Pilate and most people today that Jesus had to continually point it out to his own disciples. As followers of Jesus, we are called to look at the world with the wonder of a child. To be dependent on God alone, not worldly power and status, not material possessions, or financial success, but God Alone! As a child is present to the moment, be present to what God is doing in the world. We spend so much time worrying about the future or what has happened in the past and Jesus says be present to this moment. As we move out of the pandemic this year be present to the moment. How is Christ calling us as his church to respond to new opportunities?

God’s kingdom and the reality that Jesus points us to is the one that is present, but we don’t always perceive. It is so easy to get caught up in what is happening politically in our country right now, to the needs of various groups of people around the world and the chaos that watching the news will draw us into. Jesus tells us to stop and look at the moment with the love that God has for each person, those we like and those we don’t. Jesus tells us that there is another reality here right now and one that we, as the Body of Christ, are called to bring to fruition. The Innovation Team has been meeting since June to look at our church’s strengths and challenges. They have noticed that, while our diversity is a gift, it is also a challenge as we seek to work together. There is a need to move away from ‘us & them’ language. We are all one in Jesus Christ. Our devotion to

Jesus Christ as Lord takes precedence over our alliance to nationalities and ethic groups or we are not living into our Baptismal Covenant.

The kingdom of God is not of this world but is in the world. When we treat each person with dignity and resist evil in whatever form it takes, we are living into the kingdom of God. When we gaze in wonder at the beauty of a sunset or encourage each other we are living into the kingdom of God. When we minister to others through our participation in a ministry of the church, we are living into the kingdom of God. When we can find abundance in our lives and be grateful, we are living into the kingdom of God. To follow Jesus requires seeing the world with new eyes, eyes of gratitude and generous assumptions about other people's actions. To follow Jesus requires us to 'wake up' as the Advent season calls us to do and see the world and each other as the beloved of God.

We are not in control as Pilate assumed he was in control. God is in control, and we are to follow where Jesus leads us as individuals and as a faith community. It is not easy, it is much easier to follow our own cultural norms, but Jesus calls us to see beyond this reality.

To perceive God's reality is to be present to the moment, what does this person or our church need right now. What is God calling us to do in this moment? When Pilate asks Jesus if he is 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."* (John 18:37) Jesus testifies to the truth. The Truth of God's kingdom present in this world. While our country struggles with 'what is truth' Jesus calls us to listen to him. We are to follow his teachings and proclaim God's love to our world. The Truth is Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection to new life that overcame the powers of this world. It is following Jesus into new life through him. It is building a relationship with Truth as shown by Jesus in his actions in the world. It is a way of resisting violence and respecting the dignity of every human being. It is seeing the reality of God's kingdom here in our midst and working to manifest that kingdom through our lives.

Advent is a time to 'wake up' and deepen our relationship with Jesus. Then out of that relationship we are called to engage the world and its messiness, its various perspectives on what is 'real' and what is Truth. In Jesus' Truth there is no 'us & them', all are one in God's love. Jesus calls each one of us, just as he called his first disciples to surrender our desire for control and power to him so that he can serve the world through us, individually and as a faith community. This Advent we will wait once again in expectant hope for the coming of God's Truth into our world. But today we, on the Feast of Christ the King, are to worship God and follow Christ our King into the world.