

John 18:33-38a

## What is Truth?

This Sunday marks the end of the church year. Each new Christian calendar year begins with Advent and the birth of the Messiah and ends with this, the Reign of Christ Sunday. The history behind this particular Sunday is something of a modern-day twist and having just come off of Remembrance Day it is intriguing to see how the Reign of Christ Sunday came about. Hear how Christian educator, Jessica Davis writes about this history.

Each year, Christians from around the world gather on the last Sunday of the church year to celebrate what is widely referred to as "Christ the King" or "Reign of Christ" Sunday. It is one of the most recent additions to the church calendar, instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 and moved to its current date in 1970. By the late 1970s, [it was] adopted an amended version of the Roman lectionary, and it included Christ the King.

Pope Benedict XV, who began his papacy a month into World War I, was horrified at his inability to broker a peace treaty, and at the millions of bodies piling up all across Europe. In his first encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, Benedict declared, "There is no limit to the measure of ruin and of slaughter; day by day the earth is drenched with newly shed blood and is covered with the bodies of the wounded and of the slain."

When Benedict died in 1922, he was replaced by Pope Pius XI, who declared the aim of his papacy to be "The re-establishment of the Kingdom of Christ by peace in Christ." It was in the service of this mission that he introduced Christ the King Sunday as a challenge to the church to refocus its energies on their true ruler and away from unquestioning fidelity to earthly powers.<sup>1</sup>

Given the current climate of politics around the globe it seems that a Sunday celebrating the reign of Christ is a worthy topic. In particular, the rise of Christian Nationalism in America is an example of mixing the reign of governments with the reign of Christ.

Professor Paul Miller wrote about Christian Nationalism in a piece for the journal *Christianity Today* saying,

---

<sup>1</sup> [Jessica Davis The History of Christ the King Sunday The History of Christ the King Sunday](#)  
Nov 23, 2021 Accessed November 22, 2024.

Christian nationalism is the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way. Popularly, Christian nationalists assert that America is and must remain a “Christian nation”—not merely as an observation about American history, but as a prescriptive program for what America must continue to be in the future...

Christian nationalism is...a political ideology focused on the national identity of the United States. It includes a specific understanding of American history and American government that are, obviously, extrabiblical—an understanding that is contested by many historians and political scientists. Most importantly, Christian nationalism includes specific policy prescriptions that it claims are biblical but are, at best, extrapolations from biblical principles and, at worst, contradictory to them.<sup>2</sup>

So, if nothing else, you may have learned a new term today. The thing is Christian Nationalism in various forms, and not called by that name in other eras, was really what Constantine did when he ruled the Roman Empire, where he used Christianity to dominate the masses. In many ways it was how Hitler vilified the Jewish people making it sound as if, because they had not accepted Christ as the Messiah, they were wrong and needed to be dealt with.

One can see traces of Christian nationalism in Europe as well as here in Canada as refugees and immigrants who come to our countries, often with a different faith tradition and different cultures than what we think we have become accustomed to, face racism, abuse, and intolerance. In is often outspoken Christians who use fear mongering to intimidate and fight for what they understand to be the true way the government should be handling things.

The thing is, even in Jesus' time as he stood before Pilot, charged with no crime at all, we see how politics and power were at work. When Pilot asked the people. “What charge to you bring against this man? They said, “If he hadn't been doing something evil, do you think we'd be here bothering you?” And the conversation continued between the Jewish temple authorities and Pilot as he says to them, “You take him. Judge him by your law.” The Jews reply, “We're not allowed to kill anyone.” (John 18:30-33) It was true, but it was also a way to take the problem, that was Jesus, out of their hands.

After the conversation, Pilot heads back into the palace and point-blank asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

And this is where the whole conversation about kingdom comes about. You see Pilot was never concerned with whether or not Jesus was a problem for him. He was just trying to keep control over the situation. It was a crowd control situation. I can tell you that the Jewish authorities never referred to Jesus as King of the Jews. In fact, they

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul Miller. [What Is Christian Nationalism? - Christianity Today](#). Accessed November 22, 2024.

were pretty miffed when Pilate put that sign at the top of the cross on which Jesus was hung to die. They didn't want anyone getting any ideas about this Jesus guy who was nothing but trouble.

But why was Jesus trouble?

Well, it was because Jesus actually taught about a different kind of kingdom, even though in John he has only used those kingdom words once before and that was when he was speaking in private to Nicodemus who had come to see him in the cover of night. Yet no one could get a handle on what kingdom meant except for in earthly terms. They could not conceive of a kingdom based in the relationship of love that is the kingdom of God.

Even for us, it can be a stretch to think outside the box of what we understand of kingdom rule. We have so much human history that has displayed what power and dominion can do; how politics and influence shape countries around the globe, and only at times has any of this been good for all and not just a few. We continue to struggle for equity and justice.

God's kingdom, the one that Jesus ushered in, is one of compassion, mercy, and relationship. A relationship of care and love, of forgiveness and hope. We really do not have the imagination to see and understand how the Reign of Christ is so deeply engrained in love, goodness, wisdom, truth, and use of power. Use of power that is not meant to dominant one into submission, but is rather an invitation to live in a way of love, goodness, wisdom, and truth, that truly has the power to change the course of history.

And let's take a look at that word truth, as there is a really important statement that Jesus makes in the midst of this interrogation. It begins with Pilate asking once again, "So, are you a king or not?"

Jesus answered, "You tell me. Because I am King, I was born and entered the world so that I could witness to the truth. Everyone who cares for truth, who has any feeling for the truth, recognizes my voice."

<sup>38</sup>Pilate said, "What is truth?" ...What is truth?

Truth was standing in front of Pilate and he did not recognize truth. Truth was how Jesus lived and showed us that compassion, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and love are the tenants of a life of truth. If Christian faith is heads in any other direction...thinks of itself in terms of them or us rather than we are in this together...then it is not truth.

Truth is standing up for the outcast, being present for the lonely and the sick. Truth says that all humanity is sacred and each person created in the image of God is valuable. Truth is not just for those we like because they think and act look like us. Jesus' truth is the divine extension of love and is grounded in a theology that God gives, not as the world gives.

God's kingdom is one of freedom, compassion, and joy. Freedom to love, not to harm. Freedom to accept that we are all children of God. Freedom because, in our humanness, when we are led astray or go wrong, we can experience forgiveness and stand up again to do better because we know better.

The kingdom of God is not a place, it is relational. This why Jesus can say that his kingdom is not of this world. But it sure can impact this world! As professor and preacher Karoline Lewis writes, "When kingdom is construed from the truth of relationship and not rule, from the truth of incarnation and not location, from the truth of love and not law, then Jesus as truth will ring true."<sup>3</sup>

Today may we bring the kingdom of God to earth through our love, justice, kindness, and mercy extended to all we encounter and those we influence. In Christ, through Christ, and with Christ. Amen

---

<sup>3</sup> Karoline Lewis [Kings of Relationship - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#) Accessed November 22, 2024