

Happy New Year! No, we are not in a time warp—we haven't missed Advent or Christmas. This is the last Sunday of the church Calendar. A new year begins next Sunday with the arrival of the Advent season. This also begins a new Church year in the lectionary; Year C where we will be focusing on the Gospel of Luke. This last Sunday of the church year also marks the Reign of Christ—the king of kings, and the Lord of Lords. We hold up Jesus as the one anointed by God, the Messiah, the King of the Jews, the chosen one to be the deliverer and saviour of the world.

Can you picture Jesus as a king in his day? In Jesus' time a king was the most powerful human being on earth. When the king spoke, people trembled. The king was the only means of peace and security in the world. The king was honoured, respected, and served. He was also revered, feared and obeyed. The king was of utmost importance; he was everything to everyone and he held all the authority. Now picture Jesus as the king just described. Hard to imagine isn't it?

So when we examine the text this morning, John 18:33-37, we can begin to understand why Pilate had a problem seeing Jesus as King. Pilate served the most powerful king in the world, Caesar, and knew what a king he was. He knew Caesar's power, authority, the obedience he demanded and the power he held to

keep that obedience. Pilate knew and accepted the rules as they were set down. He was in charge of making and enforcing the rules in Jerusalem; he also knew the consequences of ignoring the rule. One of these rules was that anyone who claimed to be a king, anyone who dared to set themselves up as an authority over and against the lawful authority of Caesar was to be executed. This is one rule Pilate had no problem in enforcing and he would have enforced this rule throughout Galilee.

The charge against Jesus as he stood before Pilate was that of a revolutionary—that Jesus was unlawfully claimed to be the Messiah, the King of the Jews. The idea that this bruised and battered man who stood before Pilate was a king must have seemed ridiculous even to Pilate. Pilate knew how kings acted, what they looked like and this man certainly did not fit the description. Nevertheless, Pilate does his duty and asks Jesus if the charges against him are true. Pilate asks Jesus if he is, or if he claims to be, King of the Jews. A great debate goes on between Pilate and Jesus at this point. Jesus tells Pilate “My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No, my kingdom does not belong here!”(v36) Pilate tries to get Jesus to admit that he is a king but Jesus turns Pilate’s words back on him by saying “you say that I am a

king.”(v37b) Jesus tells Pilate that he has come into the world for the sole purpose of revealing the truth. Pilate wants to know “what is the truth” (v38).

We see a trial going on here in the text but who is on trial—Jesus or Pilate. The religious leaders want Jesus punished for what they call his revolutionary ideas. If Pilate cannot give these leaders what they want, he will lose control over the nation he rules. If Pilate loses control over the people in Galilee, he has failed Caesar and the Roman Empire. Pilate finds himself trapped between the religious leaders and the Roman Empire. Where will this leave him? Will Pilate lose his position in the Empire and favour with Caesar? Pilate finds himself in a real dilemma.

This is a story about two fellows who find themselves in a dilemma. Two hunters came across a bear so big that they dropped their rifles and ran for cover. One man climbed a tree while the other hid in a nearby cave. The bear was in no hurry to eat, so he sat down between the tree and the cave to reflect upon his good fortune. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, the hunter in the cave came rushing out, almost ran into the waiting bear, hesitated, and then dashed back in again. The same thing happened a second time. When he emerged for the third time, his companion in the tree frantically called out, "Woody, are you crazy? Stay in the cave till he leaves!" "Can't," panted Woody, "there's another bear in there."

Source Unknown

This is kind of the dilemma Pilate finds himself. Have you ever found yourself in this sort of situation? Which way did you turn? Would you do the right thing or follow as Pilate and look after yourself first? How did you decide which was the best way to solve your dilemma?

Jesus does give Pilate the opportunity to find his way out of his dilemma by searching for the truth. When Jesus asks “do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”(V34) he is trying to reach the real Pilate. The one trapped in his own despair. Jesus invites Pilate to share the complexities in his life, to reveal himself to Jesus, and to be truthful in his own person. Jesus is offering Pilate a chance to see the truth of God and God’s works. “Whoever belongs to truth listens to me” (v37b) Jesus is offering Pilate, the good shepherd. Jesus, the good shepherd, who when his sheep listen to his voice, are led into abundant life (John 10). But Pilate refuses to face the truth and dismisses what Jesus has to offer.

Truth can be transformative but first we have to discern who we are and what we have become. We have to be obedient to the ways and truth of God. We must live into what we should and can be. We must look deeply into ourselves and see what is right or wrong with our own actions and attitudes not only towards

others but towards ourselves. We must challenge ourselves and look beyond what we think to be the truth and look for the truth found in God. Jesus represents the love and grace that is God. We must carry on an intense individual and communal dialogue to help ground ourselves. We can do this through private and prayer in community, worship, religious education, meetings, and all the other ways we gather as people of faith and active witnesses in the world. Truth is a vital element in sorting out the complexities of life. We must be alert, open, listen wisely, and be willing to walk in this truth. We must also regard truth as the challenge and gift God gives to us through infinite love and grace.

Our challenge now is to picture Jesus as King not of this world but in the Kingdom of Heaven. His authority does not come from this world and is not meant to be power over others as it is in our world. Jesus exercises his authority by serving others, forgiving others, healing others, giving to others, and by sacrificing himself for others. The power Jesus has is the power of truth, the power of faith, the power of hope, the power of love and the power of life itself. The Kingdom that Jesus talks about is in the present, it is real, and it makes demands on us.

Jesus calls us to be obedient, to be faithful, and to love here and now. We are not forced or compelled to do this. Jesus calls us to allow God to enter into our lives and to rule our lives. We are invited to walk in the light with Jesus. He

shows us that if we follow him, then there will be healing and wholeness for us as well.

Pilate found Jesus not guilty of being a king but Jesus was executed anyway. He did this to please the crowd which had assembled before him, the Emperor Caesar and to fulfil his own ambitions. The King we look to when the world seems to be falling apart is Jesus Christ, when we are in need, when we seek justice, and when we look for mercy. We look to Jesus not in a forceful way but with love. Jesus satisfies our needs through the faithfulness he has in God. This faithfulness vanquishes death and brings healing and peace to all who follow him. This is the king to seek and follow because in him, life is full and abundant with love.

Amen