

*Copyright November 24 & 25, 2018. All Rights Reserved. Geist Christian Church*

**Title:** King of Kings

**Date:** November 24 & 25, 2018

**Preaching:** Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

**Scripture:** [Revelation 1:4b-8](#)

**Text:** [John 18:33-37](#)

**E-mail:** [Randy Spleth](#)



You may not know this but today is the end of the year. If that sounds as if I am confused or getting ahead of myself, I'm not. When it comes to the Christian calendar, it's not like a regular calendar. Instead of starting on January 1, the church begins on the first Sunday of Advent. That is next Sunday which means that today is the last

Sunday on the Christian calendar. If that sounds odd to you, there is a logic behind it.

The church calendar evolved over the last 1000 years to guide us through the life of Jesus. It begins in anticipation of the birth of Jesus ending on that Holy Night when we fall on our knees at the manger. Then, we spend 12 Christmas days celebrating his arrival. Next up is Epiphany, a time to remember that Jesus' light shines into the world. The season of Lent follows as we walk alongside Jesus on his way to the cross and his death for you and me. Then, we experience his resurrection on Easter and shout Hallelujah, he has risen for 50 days. On Pentecost, when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The longest season of the church calendar is after Pentecost. Kingdomtide is about encountering Jesus, hearing him preach and teach, help and heal, becoming more and more convinced that he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Finally, we come to this Sunday, the last Sunday of the year, to crown him with many crowns because, on the last day of the year, it is King Sunday, Christ the King.

This may be familiar to you if you grew up in a church with a strong nod to liturgy and the church calendar. Or you may be thinking, wait a minute, I know Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, but where did this Christ the King Sunday come from? I've not heard you talk about it before. Depending on your worship discipline and schedule, you could be right. Most of the time, the last Sunday of the church calendar falls on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. So, Christ the King Sunday get pushed aside for the more pressing holiday.

But this year, Advent doesn't start until next Sunday. It's all based on how many Sundays you have in December before Christmas. If you have four, like this year and next, Christ the King shows up after Thanksgiving.

I'll admit that it isn't my favorite celebration on the church calendar. Part of it is the subject matter. "King, kingdom, and reign" are all highly charged political words. They say something about power, about who has it, and conversely, who does not, about who's in charge over you. Americans fought a war of independence because we didn't want a king and we still don't. We are a democracy, not a monarchy. So we bristle when we hear the word king and we aren't comfortable with the implied question that such a day seems to ask. Who is the king of your life? Who's in charge; who rules? If we are honest, there's not an easy answer.

But it is also the timing of the day. Once Thanksgiving is over, I'm ready for Christmas. We start decorating the house and putting the lights up, displaying our nativities while humming *O Holy Night*. Reading the lesson for Christ the King feels out of context. I think you'll agree. It comes after Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. On our recent pilgrimage we read it among the olive trees, we remembered how Judas, flush with 30 pieces of silver, shows up with soldiers, police and a kiss. Jesus asked who they were looking for. They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." And Jesus said, "I am he." They arrest Jesus, take him to Caiaphas, the high priest of the Temple. Then, they hand him over to Pontius Pilate, accusing Jesus of insurrection, saying "this man claims to be king." The lesson for today begins when Pilate asks, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (John 18:33c)

Pilate understood that this is a serious charge. Pilate represents the Roman Emperor, Tiberius Caesar. Throughout the whole empire, he is the one and only king. If Jesus is claiming to be king, it is a serious problem and Pilate, the governor of Judea, is the one to stop him. So it is not a casual question, even though his voice seems to drip with sarcasm. It should, given that Jesus is standing before him, bruised and bedraggled from his Garden arrest and questing by Annas and Caiaphas.

Jesus' response is interesting. Instead of a direct answer, he comes back with another question: "Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'"

(John 18: 34) It sounds almost smart-alecky or at least bold considering his situation. The Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate after their illegal midnight trial. They made it clear that their expectation was that Pilate would condemn him to death so one would think that flippant replies might not be the best idea. "Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation

and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" (John 18:35). Jesus responds, but not in a way that would satisfy or answer Pilate's question. "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)

It was confusing to Pilate and it has been confusing to many over the centuries. Part of it has to do with a translation error. For years, the passage read, "of this world." My kingdom is not *of* this world. My kingdom is not *of* this world makes it sound like it is something spiritual like it is something you go to later, out of this world. It is not *of* this world. It floats off into heaven. That's not what Jesus was saying at all. The correct translation is "*from* this world." "My kingdom is not *from* here."

He's not saying that his kingdom doesn't exist on earth, rather, it didn't come from here.

He is talking about origin not location, about who authorized his kingship. He is saying, "Nobody elected me king. I didn't run for office. The world didn't give me my kingship. My father in heaven gave it to me and no power on earth can take it away."

Pilate, still confused says, "'So you are 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)

There is again, the question of the day. Who is your king? You may not think of it that way but that's what is implied. If you listen to someone's words, yield your life to their truth, you are giving them authority over your life. You are making them a king. That's what Jesus is saying and what this day is asking. Who is your king?

It is an important question because everybody worships something or somebody. Paul Tillich, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's great theologians said whatever your ultimate concern is in life, that's your God. That's your king. It might be your appearance or bank account or a popular media personality. It might be allegiance to our country, or to a sports team. It might even be something as benign as your esteem. Some people are obsessed with what people think about them. If standing up for Jesus would embarrass you in front of your peers, then you might have an answer.

What is it in your life that you value most? Some of you will say your family. And that is good. However, do you value your family more than you value

God? Tough call, isn't it? Evangelical researcher and author George Barna says that studies show that far more people in this country are willing to die for their country than they are their faith. That is very revealing, isn't it? Who is your king? Who or what do you worship? Is Jesus King of your life? If so, does it show?<sup>1</sup>

You can see why I shy away from this Sunday because, if Jesus is truly our king, then it should change the way you and I live and act. Frankly, I'm not too sure we want that. Will Willimon, the Methodist bishop tells a story when preaching on Christ the King Sunday. It is about a member of one of his early congregations. The man told Willimon about one evening when he returned from a night of poker with his friends. He had a stunning vision of the presence of the risen Christ. "Jesus appeared to me, undeniably, vividly," he said. Even though this event stirred him deeply, in ten years, he'd never told anyone about it until he shared with Willimon. Willimon asked why. Was he embarrassed or did he fear that people wouldn't believe him? "No," the man explained. The reason why he told no one was he was too afraid. "If it was truly Jesus that had come to me," he said, "I'd have to change my whole life. I'd have to do different things and act in different ways, I might become some kind of radical or something. It would impact my family and I love my wife and family. I'm scared that I'd so change, to be somebody else, and destroy my family if the vision was real."<sup>2</sup>

That's a powerful thought, wouldn't you agree? If Jesus is real and if we should encounter him, what are the implications of that experience? I guess under such circumstances we would discover who really is the king of our life.

It's why we end the Christian year with Christ the King Sunday. We've had encounters with Jesus all year long, from his birth to his death and resurrection. Throughout this long year of encounters, we should have been changed into loyal subjects who declare that Jesus really is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We come on this last day of the year to take an audit, to examine ourselves and decide, "Is Jesus really my Lord and my King?" Answer for yourself.

To call Jesus as Lord is to yield your life to his authority and truth. To crown him as king is to put him uniquely in charge of your life, obediently following in whatever the direction he chooses to lead you. Is he?

To declare Jesus is King is to mean that his kingdom priorities will be your priorities and you will be drawn to care for all of his subjects, the hungry and sick, naked and imprisoned, even to those who are different, different looks or beliefs, or politics, language or orientation. Are you?

To proclaim Jesus King is to take your faith seriously, to be in worship, to be in fellowship, in prayer and to give sacrificially, just as Jesus did. Have you?

And, to crown Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords means we are prepared to give to Jesus a love and loyalty that will be given to no other person in the universe. Will you?

I don't know about you but when I consider this annual four question exam of "Is he in charge, are you drawn, have you taken, and will you love?" my first response is a not a resounding, "Yes, all hail King Jesus." But rather, my response is to confess, to say "no" by falling on my knees. When it comes professing Christ the King, it's the appropriate posture for most of us.

We need to fall on our knees. Consider it your charge for the day. You can also consider it practice, for next month, for *O Holy Night*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Elvis and the King, King Duncan. Retrieved by subscription @ <https://sermons.com/sermon/elvis-and-the-king/1483625>

<sup>2</sup> William H. Willimon, *The Best of Will Willimon: Acting Up in Jesus' Name* (Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition).