

## Christ the King - Last Sunday after Pentecost [34]

John 18:33-37

Today's gospel reading sees us at the end of Jesus' life in an encounter with Pilate. Not a follower or disciple, but the man appointed to judge Jesus at his trial. Pilate's job was to find out what it was that Jesus had done wrong and to decide what, if any, punishment would be necessary. So, Pilate asked questions, that's how we find stuff out, and the question he asked was about Jesus' claim to be a king.

That notion of kingship is what we explore today on this Christ the King Sunday. It was confusing to Pilate as it is to people today, how can Jesus be called a king? Kings lead nations, they have countries to run, parliaments to oversee, they lead armies and where necessary they defend their kingdom by force. Kings are generally wealthy, held in esteem by their subjects and move in social circles with other kings and heads of state. In the past they have wielded real and often unchecked power with the potential for deep corruption, lately they are members of traditional royal families and have more figurehead status while leaving the governing to elected representatives.

Jesus, on the other hand, carried no weapons, commanded no army, in fact those who were willing to fight for him he expressly forbade from doing so. Jesus had no wealth, moved in the lowest of social circles and constantly challenged the religious authorities. Jesus spoke of no country, no boundaries, no place over which he would declare a kingdom, in fact he spoke of his kingdom being not of this world. It is not difficult to see how Pilate found Jesus fascinating in his questioning, and how both must have been a frustration to the other.

Pilate would have been very happy for Jesus to say "I am not a king in the way you think of kings and I pose no threat to your authority" that could have ended the trial and Pilate would have believed him. But Jesus was unwilling to renounce his title of king, he didn't ask for it, and yet despite language being inadequate to truly describe him, he would not deny leading a kingdom, even though he made it clear his kingdom was not of the world. Pilate, it seems, was stumped by Jesus' response and Jesus was unable to make his position any clearer. So the encounter continues with Jesus satisfied he is on the path that was intended for him and states that this was the reason he came into the world to testify to the truth and everyone on the side of truth will listen to him.

Jesus is a king of a type that is unrecognisable to people generally except for those on the side of truth. It would be wonderful if that statement was clearer but it would still beg the question that Pilate went on to ask in the very next verse of the gospel, but what is truth?

Modern day thinkers and philosophers have called the period we live in the Post-Modern era. It's difficult to define the present, far easier to define the past, because you know what that was all about, and yet there were those who felt it quite clearly that we have moved into a new era of thinking and that was the best name they could come up with. One of the attributes of the Post-Modern era is that there is no longer 1 truth but in fact there are many truths, at least that is what the world would have us believe. It is not ok to tell someone they are wrong, so long as they are not

interfering with anyone else. Now that seems very fair, live and let live, believe and let others believe, here the conflict will end, well if only it was that simple.

Many would argue that this idea is not working at all. A world that says there is no universal truth but many equally valid truths it seems is doing nothing but inviting conflict. That is not to say for a second, that one way is better than someone else's way or that we must all think and do the same things, rather it is to understand that when Jesus spoke of truth, he may have once again been trying to make a point that we frustratingly find difficult to understand. That is that truth transcends our beliefs, our religions, our cultures our practices. Truth is an abstract that doesn't rely on anything we do, like God is beyond us and doesn't rely on us. The existence of God is not affected by who believes in him. Just like the fact that someone is here speaking to you, you may choose to believe that is not true, but that doesn't change the fact that it is.

Truth is the same, the truth of the big questions transcends everything that divides us and affects all of humanity. Who am I? Why am I here? How will I live? These are questions posed by the former UK chief rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sachs, and are not Jewish questions, or Christian questions, they are human questions. Even atheists have asked them, they are for people of all faiths and none. The truth of the questions is unchanged. The truth of the answers, are also found in all expressions of humanity, all faiths and none, all cultures, over all ages.

Truth is not something one small group can hold and make others submit to, truth is truth, people can't affect it or change it, we can only seek to understand it.

That is where terrorists are lost, they have found answers for themselves to the big questions of truth and want everyone to live by their answers so try to push that by force. That is where imperial colonisers went wrong when they cast aside thousands of years of culture to present their own version of the truth, that is where we go wrong when we fail to see the greatest bond we have with others is our shared humanity and all the things we have used to divide us in terms of race, religion, culture, language, gender, sexuality, these are all red herrings in the search for truth. Truth transcends, Christ the King reigns over all who seek the truth, not as an earthly king through force and the rule of law, but as one who understands the universal questions and has answers for those who seek them.

Jesus could have said to Pilate that he came to be king only of the Jews, that may have even satisfied Pilate, but instead he spoke the truth of the truth. He was here for all those asking big questions. Not everyone will find the answers to those questions in the way that we do, but we have no right or power to limit God to call only certain people to him and to expect those people to come to him in a way that we recognise.

We might be just as confused by this title of Christ the King as Pilate was, but we can be encouraged that our King is not one of law and force, but a king of service and love who offers truth to those who seek it and teaches us to do the same for all of humanity in his name.