

**Hearing Voices**  
**November 24, 2024**  
**John 18:33-37**

*33Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35Pilate 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?" 36Jesus answered, "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." 37Pilate asked him, "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."*

Please pray with me. God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

The church has its own calendar and its own seasons. The year begins with the season of Advent and moves through Christmas and then Epiphany. Lent leads us to Easter. And then the long season of Pentecost ends on this day, Christ the King Sunday. It is the Hallelujah chorus to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus where we proclaim, "and he shall reign forever and ever!"

The problem with Christ the King Sunday is that to call Jesus "king" is revolting to many people. I struggle with it myself. Most kings and rulers we know from history are self-serving tyrants that use violence and threats of violence to establish order. They have little regard for the little people who suffer under the weight of the burdens these kings impose and the systems they establish. So "king" is not a title I'm inclined to use for Jesus. If Jesus is a king like the kings and Pharaohs and Ceasars we know from scripture and history, he will not get my allegiance.

But Jesus is not like those kings. The gospels go to great lengths to distinguish Jesus as different. He is not another Pharaoh. He is not another evil king. He is not another Ceasar. His mission was not to dominate, or build an empire, or exercise power over people. In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke we read about Jesus being tempted to exercise power and control like typical kings, but Jesus resists. He is not like the others. And God's kingdom is not like typical kingdoms where the rich and powerful enslave, impoverish, threaten, deport, and dominate in the name of empire or nation building.

We see this beginning with the epic story of the Exodus where God hears the cries of the Hebrew people, enslaved by Pharaoh. They are enslaved because their numbers were growing and Pharaoh perceived this as a threat to his power. So, he forced them to labor, building monuments to his greatness and authority. Their lives were bitter. God raises up a leader, Moses, to free them from slavery.

But empire was all they knew, and they were led into the wilderness where God tried to rewire their thinking to a different way of living together. God established the 10 commandments, not as expressions of law and order but of a new way of relating to God and to one another. God even gave them the gift of rest, the Sabbath, which they had not previously known. In the wilderness, where they had to trust God, they built a golden calf, and they wanted to go back to what they knew. And as they entered a new land, Joshua told them to choose this day whom they will serve. And God warned them about living in a land of abundance and how easy it is to forget God. They lived as a federation of tribes, with judges, and no centralized government.

But empire and domination were all around them and they were seduced by the power and military might of the other nations and they cried out for a king so they could be like the other nations. God told them what would happen. God told them what kings do. But they demanded. And in no time at all they were like other nations with king after king mistreating the vulnerable and using violence to control and dominate.

So God sends the prophets to confront the kings with their abuses. God sends prophets to cry out on behalf of the enslaved, the powerless, the widows and orphans. God sends the prophets to paint a picture of how life could be if they trusted in God's ways...a kingdom of peace and justice, where everyone has enough, and no one is enslaved or treated less than human.

To their peril, the kings did not listen, and their kingdoms fell. Their buildings were destroyed. Their temples were demolished. They thought they were the exception, that God would protect them, but God is not in the business of building earthly empires.

Then there is a silence in scripture. God's people are living in the darkness of exile and dispersed into foreign lands. And the prophets whisper words of hope for those willing to listen. They speak of one who will come to lead them back to God and God's ways. Into this silence Jesus is born. He is born in the context of yet another empire, the Roman Empire, and it was fierce and mighty and innovative. Caesar was called the Prince of Peace and Savior of the World, because he ended years of civil war among the Romans. But his peace came through violence. Dissenters and rebels were

crucified. Entire villages and cities were slaughtered if they dared to revolt. The Jewish people were allowed to practice their faith if it didn't threaten the empire, but the shadow of violence was always present. There was always a body hanging on a cross to make sure they understood what happened to those who resisted. People were taxed and when they couldn't pay their taxes their land was taken, leaving them to labor like slaves for others. Fishermen were taxed as Rome turned fishing into a money-making enterprise. The only way some people could survive was to become tax collectors, collecting money for Rome from their own people. Others had to sell their bodies. A glorious temple was built by a Roman appointed ruler named Herod. He was the king of the Jews. And the priests of the temple were appointed by Rome and ordered to keep the status quo. It was into this world that Jesus was born.

It is no coincidence that the gospel writers Matthew and Luke provide us with amazing but different birth stories, announcing the birth of a new king, for all people, with outcast shepherds, and mysterious foreigners, and the heavenly host welcoming his birth. Jesus is announced as the Prince of Peace and Savior of the World and we see from the very beginning that Jesus is presented in stark contrast to Ceasar and Herod. In the gospel of Mark, we don't have a birth story, but we do have a birth announcement announcing the birth of God's kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus announces good news to the people on the margins; to those who labor or who have lost their land, to those who have sold their bodies, and those who couldn't afford the temple dues and were thus labeled sinners. Jesus preaches a message of blessedness to the poor and grieving, and he restores bodies broken by illness and poverty. He models compassion, not just for those who will serve him, but even for his enemies and those who reject him. He proclaims a kingdom, God's kingdom, of peace and justice for all, a kingdom of radical trust in God and God's ways. A kingdom unlike what the people have known and experienced.

And he invites people to live in this kingdom and to abide by the law of love. He summarized all the law saying, "love God, and love your neighbor." And he made sure that those who were listening understood that all people are our neighbors. He heard and understood the cries of those suffering under oppression, and he made it his life's work to liberate them.

For a time, he had quite a following. But many of his followers were confused by him. More than a few thought the kingdom he was talking about was like all the others. They thought he was going to deliver them from the Romans and make the nation of Israel great and powerful. Jesus taught and used stories to tell them otherwise, but they didn't hear it. They didn't understand the difference.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he rode into town on a humble donkey – while Pilate rode into town on his war horse surrounded by a military entourage. The contrasting parades couldn't be clearer.

The priests are threatened by his influence and the disruption he caused and Jesus challenged those religious leaders who sold out to the Roman program. So, they conspire to silence him and drag him to Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, to be crucified.

Our scripture reading for this morning has Jesus standing before Pilate, on trial. Jesus, bloodied and beaten, stands before Pilate, who will determine his fate. Pilate is told that Jesus is claiming to be King of the Jews. Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you?" To which Jesus replies, "my kingdom is not of this world. 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."

I learned something interesting today about how Christ the King Sunday came to be. It was established by "Pope Pius XI in 1925 to reassert the primacy of Jesus' lordship over the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism in European politics."<sup>1</sup> Yet, less than a decade later, this same Pope signed an agreement with the Nazis called (Rikes-konkordat) *Reichskonkordat*. The treaty guaranteed the rights of the [Catholic Church in Germany](#). Bishops were required to take an oath of loyalty to the Governor or President of the [German Reich](#). The treaty also required all clergy to abstain from working in and for political parties. Don't you wonder? Where was the voice of Jesus in such an agreement?

On this Christ the King Sunday is: Do you hear his voice?

Do you hear him saying, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself?" Do you hear him saying, "Blessed are the poor?" Do you hear him saying, "Forgive, 70 X 7 times?" Do you hear him saying, "Turn the other cheek?" Do you hear him saying, "The first shall be last. The least are the greatest?" Do you hear him saying, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?" Do you hear him saying, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden?" Do you hear him saying, "Seek first God's kingdom?" Do you hear him saying, "Put your sword away?" Do you hear him saying, "Do this in remembrance of me?" Do you hear his voice? Do you hear him saying, "As you do it to the least of these, you do it to me?" Do you hear him saying, "If you want to be my follower, take up your cross and follow me."

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Butler Bass, Sunday Musings, November 24, 2024

To proclaim Christ as king is to listen to his voice, above all other voices.  
We know how the story ends. Pilate gives the priests what they want and hangs him on a cross. They foolishly think they have silenced him.

But he is still speaking...are you listening?