**John 18:33-37** November 21, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Christ the King Sunday

*John 18:33Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” 34“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” 35“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”*

*36Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” 37“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**What Sort of King? What Sort of Subjects?**

It was morning, in the spring of the year. Not the time of year we are in. Not the time when nature is going dormant, where we too feel like it’s time to draw things in and store them up for the long winter slog. No! It was spring! Life was returning; the days lengthening, strength refreshed, and plans many.

On this spring day, he was a man with a lot on his plate. He was a Roman governor, and the Jews he governed had this thing called Passover. They celebrated it with almost fanaticism. Hundreds of thousands flocked to their holy city of Jerusalem. With crowds like that, trouble was always a possibility. So much so that even the Roman governors, after a fashion, took part in the Passover. No, they didn’t take part in the religious observances. But for several days in the spring they would leave the comfortable sea-side administrative capital of Caesarea to take up residence in Jerusalem. They needed to be close to the action and potential trouble. So it was that this spring morning dawned on Jerusalem with Pontius Pilate in town.

Whether he woke up in Caesarea or Jerusalem, Pilate had to keep an entire province of the Roman Empire functioning. Apparently, he was an able governor. He served there ten years which was an unusually long time in this context. As Roman governor he had other duties. He was commander of all Roman military forces in the province and also the chief judge of the province. He had a lot on his plate. Every day he had a lot on his plate! And this morning he had the added annoyance of not waking up in his own bed.

As the first sliver of the sun topped the horizon on this busy spring morning, some of the locals knocked on his door. If it had been *one* of them, it would have been business as usual, a short conversation. But this morning it was a bunch of them. And their guards. And a roughed up guy in custody. This was going to be a problem. Pilate’s plan for the day was going up in smoke.

I didn’t paint this picture of Pilate to burn three or four minutes of pulpit time. I want you to know that in at least one way, Pilate was like you. You have things that need to get done. Your appointment book is full. You also have a list of things you would like to get to, but just can’t ever seem to. Like Pilate you have to work with people, some of whom are needy, some of whom are trying to use you for what they can get, many of whom are helpful, and a few of whom seem intent on taking you down.

On one of those busiest days of life, complicated by the complicating people of life, Jesus stepped into Pilate’s life. As happens when he steps into your life, it’s just about the most inconvenient moment possible. And he stands there and won’t go away, because he is King.

Jesus usually doesn’t look like king when he does that. Heaven knows he didn’t when Pilate first laid eyes on him. All four of the Gospels record parts of the conversation between Pilate and Jesus. All four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—record Pilate’s first words to Jesus: ***“Are you the king of the Jews?”***

Pilate was a busy man on a busy day with big things to do. He didn’t have time for Jesus. So, like a good administrator, he cut to the quick. He asked the question that would get Jesus moved along out of his way and out of his life as quickly as possible. ***“Are you the king of the Jews?”*** The governor’s keen eye could see that this Jesus, if he were a royal pretender, was not a very good one. He was dressed like a peasant. He’d been mildly beaten up. There was no protest crowd outside in support of Jesus. It seems that the Roman governor was not very worried over Jesus’ threat to Roman rule in the eastern Mediterranean region. ***“Are you*** *[really]* ***the king of the Jews?”***

To Pilate, Jesus looked like a man to be dealt with quickly and dismissed.

Then Jesus answered. ***“Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?”*** Jesus had a way of answering questions. You Christians are familiar with it. He almost never answered questions directly. Nor did he answer like the practiced avoiders of pointed questions we know so well: politicians. Politicians when they hear a question they don’t like, they ignore it. They pretend you didn’t even say it. They change the subject. You’ve heard it countless time in radio and television interviews. When Jesus doesn’t directly answer a question, he does the opposite. He rushes at the question. He moves beyond the question to what is behind the question.

***“Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?”*** Jesus knows that it was not Pilate’s idea. It was the line the Jewish religious leaders had fed him. Jesus challenged Pilate’s self-assuredness. Jesus answered in that way to tell Pilate that he had better reach his own conclusion about Jesus. It wasn’t because Jesus was concerned about justice for himself. That wasn’t the point. Jesus was concerned about Pilate. He wanted Pilate to know him, to believe on him.

Jesus stood in Pilate’s courtroom, demanding Pilate’s time, his thought, and yes, even his submission. ***“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”***

But Pilate was trapped in the place where all of the world’s high and mighty are trapped—trapped in the perceived, dare I say, imagined importance of what they are doing. They have entire counties, states, and nations; companies, brands and fan bases that demand their complete dedication. They don’t have time for religion, the “opiate of the masses.” They don’t have time to add this Jesus guy to their full plates. They don’t have time for Jesus to step into their lives and stand there asking them questions, suggesting that he is some sort of king to whom they owe their time, their effort, their money.

It’s not just the high and mighty who get trapped. Your concerns may be different but yours are every bit as real and consuming. Just because you don’t govern a state doesn’t mean you have an empty calendar. You may not have a company to run, but you do have a child to grow into an adult. You may not have lots of people to boss around, but you have to clean your own bathroom, and take the car to the shop on your own. No one’s going to do it for you. You may not have the demands of making a high six digit salary, but you don’t have the benefits either. Your struggle is not to put champagne in the wine fridge but to put the food on the table, food you may even have to cook on your own!

And there stands Jesus in the doorway as you try to hurry about life, as you try to rush past him out the door. He insists on having a talk with you. ***“My kingdom is not of this world… I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”***

You see, Jesus is king. He is the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, true God. Kings have authority. Kings have the right to make demands. Jesus refuses to be a convenience, something that sits on the end table and that you play with when finally have the time to sit in the recliner. He makes demands that you take up a cross, that you seek first God’s kingdom, that you be holy as God is holy, that you be rich toward God, that you part with your possessions for the sake of the poor, that you lose your life, that you turn the other cheek to the one who strikes you, that you pray and never give up. Do you know that every one of those is a direct quotation of Jesus to his followers. As king, he has a right to our time, our talents and our treasure. It doesn’t matter how busy you are, or what you would prefer to be doing at this moment. And Jesus concludes with some of the last words he spoke, a kind of summary to his preaching ministry. ***“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”***—orders from the top of the chain of command!

How far we fall from actually treating Jesus like a king! Maybe you know the rest of the story with Pontius Pilate and Jesus. Maybe you know how Pontius Pilate found no basis for any legal charge against Jesus, yet he literally washed his hands of Jesus and let his enemies crucify him. Maybe you, like me, are shaking your head at the opportunity lost. What more could any human being ask than a one-on-one conversation with the Son of God. And one like this! where Jesus lays it all out on the table! But Pilate couldn’t be bothered with Jesus on this busy spring morning. The loss of time, the possibility of a spat with the religious leaders, he just wasn’t worth it. If that is how Pilate ended his life—and we have no reason to think otherwise—well… It has been said that those who insist on not being bothered by God on this earth will one day, and for eternity, get their wish. God’s judgment on Judgment Day will give people what they wished for all their lives: eternal separation from God.

Thank God that Jesus, while a king, was not like the kings of this world who live for their own glory and power. The most important job a king has is to guard and protect his people. None have done so anything like the extent that Jesus did. The reason that Jesus stood before Pilate as humbly as he did, was because he is a faithful king. Jesus explained, ***“My kingdom is not of this world.”*** Since his kingdom is not of this world, neither do his kingdom’s subjects or its borders or its laws or its citizenship tests conform to those of worldly kingdoms.

As he taught in great length in his parables about the kingdom of God, his kingdom consists of a spiritual kingdom. His kingdom is in the hearts of all who acknowledge him and trust in him as the Son of God and Savior of mankind. That’s called faith. People enter citizenship in his kingdom, the Holy Christian Church, through faith in his greatest deed as king, when he laid down his life to pay for the sins of the world so *“that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

*[Not entirely happy with the previous two paragraphs, they leave out that there is an important difference between Pilate and us. We know Jesus.]*

He is rightly called king because he laid aside everything for his subjects. He laid aside heaven and he laid aside his life on this earth.

And so it is that his ***“servants did not fight to prevent [his] arrest.”*** How could they? To be sure, one of them had tried to fight to prevent his arrest, but Jesus had insisted that is not how his kingdom works.

Jesus’ servants do not fight for him, but we do absolutely listen to him, speak about him and work for him. When he inconveniently steps into our lives telling us to set aside time for him and his word, we do it. We find ways to worship him, even when our work schedule threatens to get in the way, even when the body aches, even when academics and sports fill up the weekends and threaten to rob God of his time. Jesus is king! We hear that Christ’s gathering of believers has need of volunteers for the ministries of our church, for the church council, for cleaning or visiting or befriending or transporting, and we make time for it. Jesus is king! We know that God’s work requires money, not wastefully, but wisely budgeted and spent, and so we give generously, regularly, and proportionally of our earthly treasures. Jesus is king!

When the king steps into your life, into your house, it doesn’t matter how busy we are or how much he asks, because Christ is king, the author of our salvation. It is an honor to be asked, and our desire to serve. Amen.