

# CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### Jesus Didn't Come to Play Politics

#### John 18:33-37

*Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"<sup>34</sup> "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"<sup>35</sup> "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?"<sup>36</sup> Jesus 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."<sup>37</sup> "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."*

What do you think about President Obama? Depending on whom I asked that question, I'm sure I would get a wide variety of responses. Some are ready to chisel his face into Mt. Rushmore. Others think he is the worst president this country has ever seen. Politics can be a very touchy subject. But it is a subject we can't avoid this morning. Today is Christ the King Sunday. You can't really talk about a king and his kingdom without talking politics. As we look at our lesson from John's gospel, however, we see that Jesus is not a typical kind of king. Even though the people of his time and people still today often try to see Jesus as a political figure, the truth is Jesus didn't come to this earth to play politics. He had a much greater mission than that. And we are thankful for it.

Our reading today takes us inside a meeting between Jesus and a Roman politician – the governor Pontius Pilate. What led Jesus to this encounter? He was handed over to Pilate by his own people who were seeking to have him executed by the state. This was the culmination of Jesus' ministry on this earth. He had spent three years preaching and teaching the Word of God, healing the sick, casting out demons and it had all led to this—a mob of people arresting Jesus and wanting him crucified. It doesn't seem to make sense. Why didn't the people embrace Jesus and worship him as their Lord? Why such hatred toward him? Pilate must have had similar questions running through his head. He wanted to get to the bottom of this matter. So he took Jesus away from the crowd and asked him privately: "Are you the king of the Jews?" This was one of the charges being brought against Jesus: that he claimed to be a king and thereby was threatening the Roman emperor. If this were true, it might make sense to Pilate that the people were in such an uproar. This wouldn't be the first politician who incited anger and hatred among the people. Pilate had probably seen it before.

But Jesus quickly dispelled any notion that he had come to be a political figure and set up an earthly kingdom. Jesus told Pilate very clearly: "*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.*" If Jesus had come to be an earthly king, he would have gone about

his business quite differently. No earthly king would allow himself to be arrested the way Jesus did without putting up a good fight. Not only did Jesus have a band of disciples who would have been willing to draw swords for him, he also had legions of angels on his side who could have made some quick work of that mob, which had come upon Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. In fact, had Jesus come to be an earthly king, his whole ministry would have been of a different nature. He would have tried to win over the influential and powerful members of society, not worked among the lowly and rejected as he often did. He would have used his miracle working power to draw attention to himself and then use his followers to overthrow the government. Instead, Jesus often tried to deflect the attention of the masses and used his miracles as an opportunity to give authority to the Word of God which he proclaimed.

Had he come as an earthly king, the people wouldn't have been so upset. That is what they were seeking. It's precisely because he did not come to be an earthly king that the mob was against him. We see that same tendency in people today. People still try to see Jesus as an earthly political figure. They try to argue whether Jesus would be a Republican or a Democrat. They try to use Jesus to push a political agenda, which is completely contrary to the reason he came to this earth in the first place. His mission was not a worldly one, but a heavenly one.

There is a part in each of us that wishes it were different. We would like it if Jesus' mission were to make our lives on this earth better—right here, right now. We would like him to take away all of our financial troubles or health problems that cause us stress and sadness. But that is not who Jesus is. His kingdom is not of this world. He didn't come to simply make our lives better on this earth. He came on a much greater mission. We have a much greater problem that needs Jesus' help than any earthly one we might complain of—that is the problem of sin and the punishment it deserves. If Jesus simply made our lives on this earth better—gave us all the material blessings we could handle and a long life free from pain and suffering—but did nothing about our spiritual problem of sin, he would be a complete failure. He would not be the kind of King we need.

Thankfully, Jesus knew his mission. Pilate didn't get it. He simply latched onto Jesus' words about his kingdom and came to the conclusion, "You are a king, then!" But Pilate was still thinking in worldly, political terms. Jesus further explained his mission by saying, "*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.*" Jesus did not deny that he was king. In fact, he said that this is the very reason he came into this world. What really matters, however, is the kind of king that Jesus is. In order to understand this, Jesus says, you have to be on the side of the truth. What does it mean to be on the side of the truth? Just hours before his trial, Jesus had prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*Lord, sanctify them by the truth. Your Word is truth.*" In order to know the kind of king we have in Jesus, we have to know the Word of God.

The Word clearly proclaims Jesus' mission in coming to this earth. The Word speaks of the work of Jesus primarily in spiritual terms. He came to this earth to take care of your greatest spiritual need—your need for forgiveness. Without forgiveness, your sins would

drag you down to hell forever. With forgiveness, your future is one of unending joy in heaven. That is a pretty big difference. And that is the difference that Jesus makes in your life. Shortly after his meeting with Pontius Pilate, Jesus was hauled away and crucified. This was the reason he came into the world. This was his greatest act as king. It didn't look very noble. It looked downright awful for him to suffer and die in that way. But that is what we needed for him to do. Through his death on the cross, he took upon himself the punishment our sins deserve and he gives us forgiveness and life in exchange. There is nothing greater he could have done for us.

Being a part of Jesus' kingdom means knowing the truth of his love as it is found on the pages of the Bible. It means trusting in him as your Savior and being a part of his family of believers. It's not a kingdom you can see. It doesn't have boundaries, it doesn't have a national language or a national currency. It transcends all earthly political kingdoms. It is far greater than those. It is a spiritual kingdom that is found in the hearts of those who claim Jesus as their king by faith. This is the kingdom that Jesus came to this to establish and it is the kingdom that he still rules to this day.

Earthly politicians may promise us many wonderful things. They may talk about how they can help to make our lives better. But so often they disappoint us. They let us down. Jesus never disappoints. He may not always give you what you want, when you want it. But he always gives you what is best. And you know that he always keeps his promises. He keeps his promises to forgive us, love us, strengthen us and guide us with his Word. He will keep his promise to take us to be with him in heaven for an eternity. He is the King we need. He is the King we worship. He is the King we serve. May he rule in our hearts and lives today and always. **Amen.**

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