

## Sermon by Rev David Thiem

Christ the King Sunday – 9am Wesley – 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2015

Theme: “Christ the King”

Reading: John 18:33-37

Text: “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.’ John 18:36

### Introduction

Today is the last Sunday in our Christian Lectionary Year. It seems a little strange as we align ourselves with our usual calendars and it is six weeks plus away until we celebrate the New Year. However, in our Christian Year readings, this is the climax of the year, with Christ the King Sunday. Next Sunday we begin to prepare for the Christmas event, with the beginning of Advent and the four Sundays of that season that build to the celebration of the birth of the Christ child. However for today, we centre on the theme of ‘Christ the King’ and see what that Kingship means and how it may impinge on us today in a world hugely divided, a world challenged with acts of terrorism, a world struggling with identity and for many, fearful of the future. Into this world, our world, we have this summation of our Christian beliefs, literally hanging with the image of Christ the King, almost a non-sensical concept in the power play around us. Let us look at John 18:33-37 and see through this some aspects of Jesus’ kingdom that are so different from the world and into this reflection place ourselves, our thinking and our prayerful hopes for the future.

### John 18:33-37

These few verses need to be placed in the context of the larger passage which includes much of John 18 which begins with Jesus’ arrest and ends with his crucifixion with the sign on the cross “The King of the Jews” written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek and the continuing controversy even then over Jesus’ kingship.

We read: “The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate,

‘Do not write “The King of the Jews” but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’

John 19:21,22

Within these two chapters it is as though there are two trials being conducted. One between the Jewish religious leaders and Pilate and the other between Pilate and Jesus. It is a religious and civil power play in which the kingship of Jesus is central, but mostly totally misunderstood by Pilate and a threat to the Jewish religious leaders of the day.

Jesus’ kingship is mocked by the political power of the day and we have recorded the ironic coronation of Jesus in John 19:1-3;

“Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again saying, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ And they struck him in the face.”

At issue in both trials are Jesus’ royal identity and the understanding of the nature of his kingship.

Pilate’s first words to Jesus are: ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ This question is recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus doesn’t initially answer the question, but rather turns the table on Pilate and asks him a question. ‘Is this your own idea or did others talk to you about me?’ Pilate indirectly answers Jesus’ question saying ‘Hey, it is your mob who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’

In this we need to recognise that the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, has handed Jesus over to Pilate because only he can condemn Jesus to death and not them as they are under Roman rule. They want Jesus dead and so the trial before Pilate.

Jesus then talks to Pilate about his kingdom which Jesus says is from another place.

This leads Pilate to re-iterating his initial question into an exclamatory statement: 'You are a king then!'

Jesus clearly then states: "You are right in saying I am a king. 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."

John 18:37

Suddenly Jesus is challenging Pilate about 'truth'. Truth here is envisaged as something that proceeds from the nature of God and is the reality of God. For John's Gospel 'truth' is used 25 times and is saving knowledge which frees one from sin and slavery. Truth is of God and reveals God and gives hope to the individual and the community. It is a 'sign of the Kingdom of God' at work here and now in the lives of individuals and the faith community. This is what Jesus brings. This is part of his Kingship and his Kingdom. This is why Jesus says earlier, "But now my kingdom is from another place." John 18:36b

Through all this brief discussion between Jesus and Pilate there has been total misunderstanding. Pilate has been examining Jesus to see if he is a threat to Roman rule and stability in the region, hence comes from a standpoint of military and political power. Jesus on the other-hand is talking about spiritual and Godly matters and that his 'kingdom is from another place', which Pilate simply doesn't understand.

Sound familiar for us today?!

It is into this context that we need to understand the Kingship of Christ.

### Personal Reflection

If we were asked what are the signs of the presence of Christ in a Christian community and in the lives of individuals how would we answer that?

Some answers may include:

- praying & praising community
- serving and service in the name of Christ
- social justice and social action
- caring and loving community
- nurturing and fellowship community
- faithful and hopeful community reaching out to others
- witnessing to our Christian faith by the way we live and speak
- seeking to learn more about the truth of God's word
- being open to God's Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives and in our faith community

In a sense these are all signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God here and now and of the Kingship of Christ which offers hope and peace even in the midst of a world in turmoil. That is the paradox of the Gospel over and against the authority and power of military and political might in the world.

Even in difficult situations that we might find ourselves in through life, may we take hope from Christ our King, who suffered and died on the cross but on the third day rose again that we might see the glory of God at work. Amen