

Epworth Chapel on the Green
November 20, 2016
Christ the King Sunday
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Daniel 7:9-14
Psalm 93
Colossians 1:11-20
John 18:33-38

As we culminate the church year today with the celebration of the Reign of Christ over all things, our Gospel lesson provides us with an ironic twist as it takes us to Pilate's interrogation of Christ in the last hours before his death.

Pilate's question to Jesus is, "Are you a king?"

Jesus responds, "I was born for that purpose, and I came to bring truth to the world. And all who love the truth recognize that what I say is true."

And the next question, the \$64,000 question [not in our printed lesson], comes from a perplexed Pilate: "What is truth?"

Perhaps Pilate is perplexed because he envisions truth as a concept, as a proposition. Something to be debated and argued, something to be treated at arm's length. Something bandied about in the village market place.

Many years later, people of all walks of life pick up on Pilate's question, and ask, "What is truth?" And the answers can be as diverse as the persons who ask the question.

Some want truth to be a concept, a proposition, something that is treated at arm's length. If we were to pay attention to much of what we see on television or

read in scholarly journals or the pages of our favorite magazine, we would conclude that *we want a truth that we remake in our own image*. We want truth that is weak, impotent, and relative, truth that is as individual as each person, truth which ultimately does not hold us accountable to anyone but ourselves. We want truth that is expressed in the old maxim, “everyone doing what is right in his or her own eyes.” (Where have we heard that before?)

No doubt Pilate struggles with the issue of truth as he has this conversation with Jesus. “What is truth?” He asks.

But what escapes Pilate at this moment is that the answer to his question lies not in the form of *what*, but rather *who*. For in this moment he encounters truth as a *Person*. Truth has come to Pilate concretely in the person of Jesus Christ. The “image” of the invisible God now stands face to face with Pilate. Truth has moved from the realm of the abstract to the realm of flesh and blood. *Truth has a face. Truth has a name. That name is Jesus.*

And there’s the rub, perhaps both for Pilate and for us moderns. For it is one thing to talk about truth in the abstract. It is one thing to search for truth in terms of ideas, philosophies, or systems. It is one thing to discuss truth at arm’s length, so that *your* truth never has to intrude on my truth and *my* truth never has to intrude on your truth. It is one thing to talk about truth in terms of principles.

But it is quite another thing to locate truth in a *Person*. And it is an even more preposterous notion to locate truth in the Person of Jesus Christ.

We moderns love to pursue truth. Schedule a forum, a conference, a meeting to discuss truth, and we'll show up. But we want very little to do with *Jesus*.

Today is a day when the Church reminds itself that truth ultimately is not about ideas, philosophies, or principles. Truth is not found in some sterile, antiseptic notion. On this day we are reminded that truth has a name and a face. On this day we discover anew that truth is a *Person*. His name is Jesus Christ.

To know Jesus is to know truth. To understand his life and teachings and to live your life in the spirit of Jesus' life and teachings is to live in truth.

And for thousands of years now, Christians have called Jesus KING. Based on the testimony of Scripture, the witness of the Church, and the testimony of Jesus himself, they have acknowledged his Lordship. And for thousands of years, they have been praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Yes, Christ is the King. But he's not the type of king who had a long list of military accomplishments or who lived in a grand palace and hosted the rich and famous of the world. He's the type of king who gave his life to redeem us from

our slavery to sin, and who made us friends of God when we had long been his enemies.

The poet W.H. Vanstone said it like this:

*Drained is love in making full;
Bound in setting others free;
Poor in making many rich;
Weak in giving power to be.*

*Therefore, he who Thee reveals
Hangs, O Father, on that Tree
Helpless; and the nails and thorns
Tell of what Thy love must be.*

*Thou art God; no monarch Thou
Thron'd in easy state to reign;
Thou art God, Whose arms of love
Aching, spent, the world sustain.*

W.H. Vanstone, *Morning Glory, Starlit Sky*

This is the King to whom we yield our lives. This is the King in whom we place our trust. And at the Table of the Lord, this is the King who pledges to us that he will come again, and things on earth *will be* as they are in heaven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.