

November 22, 2009  
Reign Of Christ Sunday  
John 18: 33-37  
Rev. Robin Sherman

John 18: 33-37

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium and summoned Jesus. 'Are you the King of the Jews?' asked Pilate <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, 'Do you say this of your own accord, or have others told you about me?' <sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, 'Am I Jewish? It is your own people and the chief priests who hand you over to me. What have you done?' <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, 'My realm is not of this world; If it belonged to this world, my people would have fought to keep me out of the hands of the Temple authorities. No, my realm is not of this world.' <sup>37</sup>Pilate said, 'So you're a king?' Jesus replied, 'You say I'm a king. I was born and came into the world for one purpose - to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who seeks the truth hears my voice.']

Kings and Queens and Lords and other royal terms are not part of the average Canadian vocabulary. Yes we know that our country is still officially under the British monarchy but we don't live with that reality daily. We are impressed when royalty comes to visit. Prince Charles and Camilla opened the Royal Winter Fair this year in Toronto and so royalty was spoken of for one or two headlines but soon forgotten.

No, Canadians are not all that educated on all things royal. Most of us wouldn't know how to curtsy or bow properly in the presence of royalty. Most of us wouldn't know the protocol for eating, speaking, or rubbing elbows with royalty. In Jesus time Kings, Queens, and Lords were a part of everyday life. They held a presence in their cities and areas that were of great importance. They ruled with an iron fist for the most part because they needed to keep people in their place. They could not be seen as weak or undecided. They were looked upon to make the decisions for the community and their decisions were final.

And so it is with this in mind that we listen in on the conversation between Jesus and Pilate. Pilate begins, "Are you a King?" "You say that I am."

Jesus had a way of turning things back on those who asked questions and failed to understand his ministry. You say that I am, doesn't have Jesus denying his title but doesn't have him acknowledging it either. Pilate must be

wondering who this Jesus thinks he is cross-examining the governor? The ball is returned to Jesus' court when Pilate comes back with, 'Am I Jewish? It is your own people and the chief priests who hand you over to me. What have you done?'

Again Jesus avoids Pilate's question but at least there is no question from Jesus in return but a statement about his realm, his authority when he states, 'My realm is not of this world; If it belonged to this world, my people would have fought to keep me out of the hands of the Temple authorities. No, my realm is not of this world.'

Thinking he has something concrete to pursue Pilate again asks, 'So you're a king?'

'You say I'm a king. I was born and came into the world for one purpose - to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who seeks the truth hears my voice.'

There is another line that follows this that curiously has not to been included in this morning's reading. The next line in the exchange is Pilate's, "Truth? What is truth?"

This is perhaps what we really need to study to understand the lesson from Jesus today. What is truth? And what exactly is the truth about Jesus? For some of us this question may reflect whether or not Jesus is truly, king;

But for most of us here today whether or not Jesus is King may already be answered through our faith that yes he is. Even if we don't like to use the word king or kingdom and instead use words like reign and realm, as Christians we are at least in essential agreement that Jesus is our king and we are his subjects, his people.

But what does this all mean? What kind of king? If a king is a ruler, what kind of ruler was Jesus? After all he was condemned by his own people, abandoned by his friends, dead before anyone really understood what he was about. If we are citizens of this kingdom, this realm, where exactly is it; and what exactly do we know about it? We claim to be his subjects but many of us find it difficult to define what that means and when we try to define it our attempts seem as cryptic as the exchange between Pilate and Jesus.

What can we say about our King, about our residence in his kingdom, about how the world is different because of it all?

These are the questions of the day and our readings and prayers and hymns are full of kingly language and images full of questions about the nature of

Christ's kingship, Jesus the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is a Sunday about thrones and crowns, majesty and sovereignty. Isn't it ironic that at the height of all this royalty talk we end the Christian calendar year and begin again in Bethlehem. At the height of all these questions about Christ as King next week we begin waiting for the birth of Jesus as baby only to study him growing up all over again. Year after year it is the same; we come to the same place, this same beginning, over and over, from Daniel's Ancient of Days to Mary and Joseph's baby in a hayrack. And why, what is the point of it all?

T.S. Elliot sums it up best, he says, **"To arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."** "To arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

We stand today at an intersection between a heavenly king and a mortal baby, who are as different as night and day, who are the same person, who have everything to teach us about ourselves and one another. Christ the King. The baby Jesus. Christ the baby Jesus King?

Other Kings knelt before Jesus and called him king when he was just a little plump-fisted, red-faced baby king, not on a throne but in a hayrack. He had done nothing to deserve the title except to be born and loved by God. This baby was God's answer to a world in need before he had done a single thing about it – no miracles, no healings, no preaching – nothing but baby sounds and baby looks. Did you ever think that even now, any baby born and baptised into the Christian faith has the same potential because we have been commissioned by our King - Jesus to do the same things that Jesus did on earth and we all started in the same place – as a baby.

Perhaps Jesus our King has knelt at our manger and called us king because we did nothing more than be born and loved by God; leaving us to do the rest as we grew and learned and understood who Jesus was to us.

That is where we are today, at the intersection looking forward to putting ourselves in the hands of a baby king and letting him teach us. Why don't we make it part of our Advent preparation to start paying attention to babies, any babies you can find. Watch them. See what they tell you about God, and wonder what they tell God about you. Let them teach you diapers and all: utterly inarticulate, totally responsive, listening to voices we no longer hear, just lying there knowing things we have forgotten. Let them be your mediators between the known and the unknown, between the ordinary and the divine, between heaven and earth.

Then once you have practiced with them, go ahead and draw near the baby king whose priesthood is definitive, upon whom all our claims to royalty and ministry depend. Watch him reach for the light.

Which is he, a baby or a king? A newcomer to life or the ancient of days? The most delicate creature in the world or the saviour of the whole creation? Do the distinctions begin to blur? Are the answers hard to find? Good: Welcome to the mystery of belonging to a king with no kingdom in this world, of believing a baby can change the face of history, of loving a God no one can see or explain.

And then there is the even greater mystery: That we have been chosen to carry on the work of that king, that baby, that God, in the world – just us – inarticulate, mystified babes in the faith that we are. It is said that when Jesus finally got to heaven the angels asked him who he had left behind to finish what he started.

“Just a small band of men and women who love me,” he answered, “That’s all?” the angels said, more than a little worried. “But what if they should fail?”

He replied, “I have no other plans.”

Amen

(portions of this sermon taken from the writings of Barbara Brown Taylor)