

Christ the King!
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Most of us have Thanksgiving on our minds as we are only four days away from this annual feast of abundant blessings. However, before we arrive at that celebration, we have another one to celebrate. Today we are at the end of our Lutheran liturgical calendar. Next Sunday we will begin the new liturgical year with Advent. We are accustomed to December 31 being the end of the calendar year or June marking the end of the school year. But here we are in November bidding farewell to our liturgical calendar. This is not a gentle farewell, but a resounding celebration of Christ the King. So, if you will, imagine Christ in all of his regal splendor, “ruler of the kings of the earth...the one who is coming with the clouds...the Alpha and the Omega.”

Pope Pius XI instituted this feast day in 1925. He had two intentions in mind: to celebrate Christ's kingship over all creation and to remind us to submit to Christ's rule. While the king title seems remote or antique to many of us, it is to emphasize the height, depth and breadth of Christ's reign. It is total, complete, all conclusive without exception!

So then, how is it that Pontius Pilate can be second guessing the obvious by asking Jesus, “So you are a king?” It is because Pontius Pilate lives and breathes, thinks and contemplates in territorial and political terms. Our earthly kings rule over people and places. They reside in palaces or castles. They move around with dramatic flair and fanfare. Banners are unfurled, trumpets blare and the entourage is gigantic. Frankly the gospel writers do not depict Jesus as an earthly king. Rather we know that he walked on foot, wore sandals encrusted in dust, had no entourage tending to the press and each detail, laid his head down where he could and appealed to a rag tag crowd of followers. Pontius Pilate is the governor of the Roman province of Judaea. He is responsible for maintaining peace and promoting the interests of the Roman Empire. He is among the rich and powerful.

Pilate asks Jesus five questions, including Are you a king? What is truth? Pilate is trying to understand how Jesus could be king without claiming an earthly kingdom. He can not envision Jesus reigning over people's minds and souls. What kind of a kingdom is that? A kingdom with no geographical location because it is here, there and everywhere. It is eternal, more real than real, and yet invisible. No wonder Pilate had a hard time understanding this. No wonder that we may have a hard time grasping the reality of this kingship.

Jesus tries to explain to Pilate: “I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone

who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Ah, here we have it: Those who belong to the truth will hear the voice of Jesus. Everyone here this morning belongs to someone or something: family, church, club, group or a team are some examples. We listen, at least upon occasion, to the voices that we hear in these arenas. Now, here is the question of the day. Do we belong to the truth? What might this require? The dictionary will tell us that belonging involves having proper qualifications. What are the qualifications for belonging to truth? Courage, honesty, openness and willingness come to mind as requirements for belonging to the truth. If you want to remember these qualifications, think of the acronym “chow”, but don’t dash off to lunch quite yet. What do these four qualifications require of us? Courage calls us to push beyond our comfort zone, knowing that doing so may cost us a little or a lot. Honesty beckons us to be truth tellers with ourselves as well as with others. It invites us to unwind from our own denials and agendas, and listen to the truth that Jesus is. Openness allows us to be vulnerable, to really hear and to listen passionately to what Jesus is saying. Willingness means that we show up when we say we will. We show up, we stand up for the truth to which we belong..

Recently at a memorial service here, Ruth, a 60 year old Christian woman from India, lingered to share her story with me. As a young girl Ruth’s Muslim parents sent her to a Christian missionary school, so that she might receive the best education possible. Her presence there required her to attend daily chapel services. When Ruth was 10, one of her teachers approached her after a chapel service to tell her that from the expression on Ruth’s face as she sung hymns, she knew how much Ruth loved Jesus. It was then that she realized that she was indeed a Christ follower and quietly dedicated her life to him. At the age of 10 Ruth responded to the truth of who Jesus is. “I am the way, the truth and the life. WOW! In time Ruth married a Christian and they courageously witnessed to their faith in India.. Thirty years ago Ruth’s husband was martyred for his Christian faith and witness. Life has remained difficult for Ruth and her children. Yet her witness to her king remains as strong and as faithful as ever. She continues to practice courage, honesty, openness and willingness.

It is doubtful that we will be called to be martyrs for our faith. Yet in belonging to the truth, God calls us into service, into ministry of one sort and another. We are involved in ministries of caring, repairing, leading, creating, enforcing, researching, teaching, delivering, sending, promoting, promoting and providing to name a few. An upcoming adult learning class will be taught by Augustana lay people who agree to share about their callings in their professional pursuits. I imagine that woven into these presentations will be glimpses of the Jesus truth. Why? Because I suspect that many of us already claim Jesus, not only as our lord, savior, and shepherd, but also as “our matchless king”. We are here because we belong to the truth and we grapple with it, day in and day out. We don’t always find the way easy, but we have chosen our king and we are loyal to Him.

Pilate can continue to ask his questions and wonder what the truth is. The truth is embedded in a crown of thorns and a cross, dusty sandals and a shepherd's staff. The truth includes an invitation to forgiveness and wholeness. May we today give deep thanks and rejoice that our king is robed in majesty and girded with strength, that he is the beginning and the end, that he is the king of all creation. And may we resubmit ourselves to His rule and reign forever and ever!