

Christ the King
John 18:33-37

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

As we gather to worship this last Sunday of the Church year, we look back across a year nearly completed and we look ahead to a new year that will end only God knows how. I don't know about you but it seems to me that this time of the year has come up on us really fast. Today is Christ the King and Thursday is Thanksgiving and it seems that just last week was Labor day and the end of summer. Time just keeps rushing by faster and faster. We cycle through this church calendar. It has a way of lifting up our journey of faith as we journey with Christ and the scriptures through the lectionary. We hear it through the cycle year after year.

You know the cycle by know, proclaiming the advent of God's coming, the proclamation of Christ's birth, Jesus' face turning towards Jerusalem at Transfiguration, his triumphant ride into the Holy City, his betrayal and his death, the resurrection glory of Easter and the ascension into the heavenly kingdom with the Spirit coming and the growth of the church during Pentecost. It seems like a circle that we go through every year, the same flipping through the liturgical calendar, without an end or beginning, one season simply turning into another season. Today we transition from the season of Pentecost and flow into the times of the last days and the promise of Advent the coming of the Lord, one more time around the circle. We find much of our lives is in that circle. Round and around we go, repeating the circle of events, going through the actions, repeating over and over again the circle of life. Doesn't it seem much of our life is like that, around and around again and again doing that same action, saying the same things, thinking the same things, stuck in the circle of life?

But there is another way we can look at this church calendar. This journey of life. We can look at it as a circling screw that with each turn we are moving forward. Ever slowly sometimes but still moving forward like a spiral. Life is circling and leading us, pulling us, drawing us to a final goal, our final point, our final fulfillment in the kingdom of God as part of God's eternal family forever.

This Christ the King Sunday proclaims the accomplished fact that Christ is indeed the king that promises us this final fulfillment. Christ's kingship, lordship, authority has given us this eternal promise. This is why Christ came into this world, to be the truth that gives eternal life.

That was precisely the issue confronting Pilate in today's Gospel reading. Although he phrases the questions in different ways, he was caught up in the same issues that catches us

up; where are we going. Is this just a circle of life, are we just going around and around doing the same thing, what is the point, what is the truth.

Pilate knew the political situation of the world. He knew who had authority and who had power and who didn't. Caesar ruled the Roman Empire, he was lord of the earthly nations, like Israel. This is how Pilate could hold office as governor, working on behalf of the Emperor, able to command the troops of Rome. So for the territory of Judea – Pilate spoke for the Emperor, commanded up to four legions, 24,000 infantry soldiers not to mention the Calvary, charioteers and navy that resided in the area. History records that Pilate used this power to squash rebellions and uprisings, sometimes violently and with much bloodshed. No one could stand up to him, he was the official representative of the self made Lord of the ancient Mediterranean, the almighty Caesar.

Now we have this scene between Pilate with all his power and authority standing up against Jesus, a lone man, betrayed, abandoned, beaten, bleeding. The scene is one of the most dramatic in the entire Bible. The accused Christ had been led by the High priest's guards to Pilate, the Roman Governor. The Jews could not enter the praetorium, Pilate's headquarters, or they would risk spiritual defilement just hours before the Sabbath would begin. So Pilate, remember he is the one with all that earthly power, goes out to the mob and then goes inside summoning Jesus into his headquarters. In John's Gospel, Pilate does this seven times, in and out, this most powerful man in the Judea territory, speaker for Caesar, Leader of the Legions, goes back and forth like a messenger boy seeking what to do with this humbled, bleeding, abandoned man.

Pilate enters the praetorium leaving the jeering crowds behind and calls for Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" The scene is set. There stood Pilate in his stately robes of authority, ruler of the territory, leader of a segment of the mightiest army in the world. And he is basically asking who are you? What have you done?

In truth we are all Pilates in this story. We see ourselves as rulers of our own lives, our homes, our finances. We sit here believing that we are in command of all that we are. We lead our lives going through that circle of life, working, relaxing, eating, - working, relaxing, eating, - working, relaxing, eating, And sometimes in the midst of that circle we stop to consider who is this Jesus? What have you done? Who are you? What does it all mean? Especially as we begin to spin through the cycle again at this end of the year and head towards the beginning of Advent.

We ask all these things, but the Gospel of John shows us the true meaning of Jesus. Finally here Jesus says you say that I am a king, for this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

And there is the answer! The answer to all those questions that make us ponder! In Jesus' words we hear all the meaning of the good news. There is the purpose and the meaning to all that circling of life. There is the answer to what that circle pulls us towards. For this I came into the world. Christ's kingship is not of this world, but it is indeed in this world. The kingdom of God was standing right there in the praetorium in the person of the accused Christ. The kingdom of God is even now right here in our very midst, in the personal presence of the crucified and risen Christ, as he comes through the Word read, proclaimed and heard, as the Lord comes to us in the waters of baptism, as the Lord enters into our very being through the feast of the Lord's Supper. It's as if we live in that time between the lightening of the Easter Resurrection the thunder that is sure to come in the final day. Just as in a storm you will see lightening first and you know the thunder is coming. Sometimes you even stop to count, listening to the old adage for each second the lightening is that many miles away. So you stop when you see the flash and wait for the thunder to reach you. That is what happens today. The Lightening has flashed, the brightness of the Crucifixion and the resurrection has flashed, bringing in the kingdom and we live waiting for the fulfillment of it waiting for the thunder to roar.

Yes we live in this world now, we go through the circling of life, but the truth is we know that it is heading towards God. The thunder will come, the day of the Lord is where we are heading - towards the fulfillment of that kingdom that is begun in Jerusalem but is not of this world. We leave the kingdoms of this world, the things we think we control, the things we ask about, seek to overcome, acquire, manage and instead turn towards facing Christ who is King eternal, never ending. We see in that truth the meaning of ourselves and the eternal heart of God. We see the truth and discover that the reality is that the everlasting kingdom is open to us through Jesus Christ. The King, the Lord, God almighty. The kingdom is here, begun so long ago, drawing us, pulling us, bringing us through the circles of this life until that day we join with God in the kingdom that has no end. Rejoice in that promise, that hope, that everlasting Truth.

Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, on the hill outside Jerusalem, Jesus your only son ascended his throne of glory, offering his own life so that all humanity could be saved. Beaten, bleeding and dying he

promises us that today we will be with you in paradise. We give thanks for that great promise of eternal hope through his blood. And we raise our voices to you in praise.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you bring us into your kingdom, to stand before your glory and know of your power. Transform us and make us right. Empower us to welcome others in your grace. In this world of violence and war, we need your blessing of peace. In a world filled with hatred and envy and guilt, we need your forgiveness. In a world filled with disasters both manmade and natural where so many are suffering we need you to tend to us and keep us. Lord Bless us this day with your Love, grace, forgiveness and peace.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give courage and boldness to those who are scared or worried. Give healing to those who are oppressed by sickness mentally or physically. Send your Holy Spirit to be with all those who are in need. Especially we remember today our hospitalized, our homebound and all those we name now in our prayers to you....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for this community of faithful; teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the mission of your Church. Take and use us as your witnesses, to show your love, to be imitators of your grace, to share your good news, to show your glory in all that we do on the mountaintops and in the valleys and even in our daily life as your servants in this community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.