

What Is Your Truth? Who Is Your King?
John 19:33-38

We Americans don't like kings very much. We had a revolution about that, some years ago, even before the Methodists were actually a church. We got rid of King George The Something and replaced him with a president, George Washington, and a good president he was.

We Americans are all about democracy and casting our vote to decide who our leaders are going to be and if we don't like what they do, why, we'll vote someone else in.

But as Christian people we have a king. At least we're supposed to. His name is Jesus. And today the Christian year comes to an end with this ringing endorsement: this is Christ the King Sunday. Which, honestly, is one of the most overlooked Christian Days of all, nestled as it is between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Our cultural calendar says this is the beginning of the Christmas season. Christmas trees at Food Lion and "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" on the radio tell us so.

But our Christian calendar says this is the end of a season, a year. The new Christian year begins next Sunday with Advent; it ends today with Christ the King Sunday.

But let me ask you a dangerous question: Even as long ago we preferred a president to a King in the political realm, do we perhaps prefer, in the Spiritual realm, that Jesus not be our King? In other words, do we settle for Jesus being savior, or being friend, or being shepherd, and yes he is all these things, but not king? After all, we don't like kings so very much, even if his name happens to be Jesus.

We'd much rather focus on Jesus all cuddly and cute lying in a manger, than call him king, because kings have authority. Absolute authority. We don't get to vote on kings or the policy of kings. We don't get to decide. We must simply obey.

But I suspect our ongoing struggle is that we would indeed rather have Jesus simply as savior than Jesus as king. The story is told, and it's probably not true at all, but the story is told of Billy Graham's traveling on an airplane. And it goes something like this:

The passenger next to him was loud, obnoxious, rude. He was suggestive with the flight attendant, kept demanding more and more mixed drinks, and used language more suited for the locker room. Finally, exasperated, the flight attendant turned to the passenger and said, "Don't you realize you are sitting next to Reverend Billy Graham."

The man was startled. He turned to Graham and said, "Let me shake your hand. If it

weren't for you, I wouldn't have accepted Jesus as my savior."

You see, Jesus was his savior, but Jesus wasn't his king. Not the Lord of his life, or if lord and king, of only a minute part of his life. The part where he gets what he wants: salvation, but leaves no room for Jesus to do a greater work within him.

And so we come to the time when Jesus is hauled before Pontius Pilate. He's been turned over by the Jews, and Pilate is genuinely puzzled why this has occurred. And so he asks Jesus, "Are you king of the Jews?"

However, Jesus does not give a direct answer. For one thing, the question itself begs to limit Jesus' authority. If he is King of the Jews, then he is not King of the Romans or King of the Persians, or any other people or nation.

We might even say that Jesus does not much want us to limit his kingship. It's as if we were to say, Jesus is king of my salvation, but not king of my political attitudes, not king of my racial attitudes, not king of my bank account.

Moreover, there is something much more important going on here: Jesus is refusing to use the one great weapon every king has: the weapon of command. Caesar could

command troops to go to Gaul and they went, because Caesar was king. Caesar Augustus could command everyone go to his ancestral home for census and taxing, and they went, even an impoverished Joseph and his not-quite wife, Mary, expecting a child.

But we must decide for ourselves if Jesus is to be our King. Jesus does not command, does not coerce, but invites. "Come, follow me," is an invitation, not a command.

Back to Jesus and Pilate. "Are you king of the Jews" is the question, and Jesus gives no "yes or no" answer. Instead, he replies, "My kingdom is not of this world." It's a spiritual kingdom. It's the kingdom of faith, the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God.

All of which Pilate has not a clue. "Er, so Jesus, then you are a king?" Jesus replies, "Well, you just said so, didn't you?" Which Pilate has not exactly done. He has only asked the question.

But what a question it is. Yes, Jesus could even be Pilate's king, if Pilate would accept.

Jesus then moves beyond the notion of his kingship to his reason for having been born: "I came to bear witness to the truth."

And Pilate asks, "What is truth?"

It's a profound and searching question, more profound than Pilate even realizes, I suspect. Because you see, the Greek word for "truth" does not have the connotation of mere facts, such as, the truth is the earth is 93 million miles from the sun. Or, the truth is, If you want to drive to New Bern from Beaufort, you're going to have to go through Havelock. "Truth" in the Bible means more than a set of facts.

"Truth" is not a set of facts, "truth" is the reality to which we give our absolute allegiance. "Truth" in the Bible demands a response. Truth is the foundation upon which your life stands and truth is the prism through which you view the world.

Pilate could have come to an intellectual decision that, yes, in fact, Jesus was a king, king of the Jews or even a greater king than that. But this was not truth by which Pilate was ever going to live. Truth for Pilate was that Rome was in control, that different factions should be manipulated, coerced, caressed, or controlled, in order to maintain position and power.

Which leads me to ask myself and to ask you on this Sunday, the end of one Christian year and the beginning of another, "Is Jesus your King and is Jesus your Truth?" The two

questions cannot be separated.

Back to the man on the plane: he might even believe that Jesus is his savior, but Jesus is certainly not his king and Jesus is certainly not his truth.

Now, if you are going to ask me, "Does that man still have salvation," I will answer that such is beside the point. I suppose he does, but Jesus came to proclaim something much more important. Merely to proclaim Jesus as savior is again to limit Jesus. Because Jesus' ministry was not just to save individual souls, but to transform the world itself.

To ask about salvation is sometimes to ask, "What is the least we can do, what is the least response we can make, and still enter the pearly gates?"

When Jesus is inviting us to the greatest response we can make. Jesus, I suppose, will settle for being our savior, but he wants to be something more, our king and our truth.

Because when Jesus is our king and Jesus is our truth, then we look at life a different way, we live life a different way. If Jesus is king and truth, then he informs our political opinions, rather than our political opinions informing our view of Jesus. When Jesus is king and truth, then missions becomes not a burdensome item in a budget somewhere, but a

dynamic call to action. When Jesus is king and truth, then family and church and career are readjusted and rebalanced. When Jesus is Lord and truth, then as Christian people we define ourselves not by what we are against, but by bearing the fruits of the spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,” is one good list found in Galatians.

So here we are. Christ the King Sunday. And one day Pilate asked of Jesus, “are you a king,” and he asked “What is truth.”

And if we should be asked, “Is Jesus truly your king” and “Is Jesus truly your truth,” what answer would our lives give? Amen.