

**On Sunday, November 25, 2018, the Reign of Christ Sunday, Pastor Joel gave this sermon based on the gospel reading from John 18:33-37. It is entitled, "*Out of This World.*"**

Today we celebrate **The Reign of Christ Sunday**, or as it used to be called, Christ the King Sunday. But we are so far removed from kings and kingdoms, that I think the change is appropriate. It is also the last Sunday of the church year, and so it is a day we are to ask ourselves, as we look back on the year:

- *What is this faith we share all about?*
- *Who is this Christ we profess to worship?*
- *Is what we have relevant for our lives and the world today?*

Now, I am not going to try and answer these questions, but I put them out there for you to grapple with in this week before we begin the Advent season, and the time we are to pray to, meditate on, and prepare ourselves for the coming, of the one who is at the center of all of it.

In the passage that we have from the gospel of John today, we are witness to a dialogue between Jesus and Pilate, the Roman appointed governor of Judea. Jesus had been arrested and taken to the Jewish high priest for questioning. It was basically what we might call a kangaroo court, intended to indict Jesus for crimes that would allow the religious and political leaders to sentence him to death. From there he was taken to the praetorium, Pilate's official residence in Jerusalem, with the purpose of getting Pilate to condemn him to crucifixion.

In John's gospel, written at the end of the first century, when the early church was at odds with the Jewish leadership and separating itself from its Jewish roots, Pilate is seen as an almost neutral arbitrator here, and the Jewish leadership as the primary antagonists. They bring Jesus to Pilate because they are not allowed to execute any person. But Pilate is not convinced that Jesus has done anything to account for their

condemnation.

Into this context then, we have this conversation. Pilate asks Jesus about one of the things he is accused of, namely, making himself king of the Jewish people, an act of treason and thus a capital offense. Jesus seems less concerned about the accusation, and more about whether this is information Pilate has simply heard from others, or if it is his own belief? "*Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?*" Jesus says. Pilate responds, "*Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?*"

Jesus then seeks to explain to Pilate, something which by that point, Jesus probably knows is unattainable for Pilate to understand. He says, "*My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.*" And for clarification, Pilate then asks, "*So you are a king?*", obviously not getting what Jesus is trying to tell him.

At that, Jesus then responds, "*You say that I am a king.*" seemingly suggesting that this is not what he, Jesus, would call himself, but rather what Pilate and others have labeled him. They call him a "king" because they do not really understand who and what he really is. And so Jesus continues, saying to Pilate, "*For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the **truth**. Every one who is of the **truth** hears my voice.*" And to that we have those words that have echoed down through the centuries, as Pilate facetiously or sarcastically replies, "*What is truth?*"

And there it is. The great question. Is what Jesus brings, a **universal truth**? Or is it merely a truth for those who choose to believe

him? Is it fair to ask, as Pilate in the rock opera "*Jesus Christ Superstar*" does, "*But what is truth? Is truth unchanging law? We both have truths. Are mine the same as yours?*" Is the **truth** that Jesus brings really for **all** of us or just for some? Are those of us who call ourselves Christian and who seek to live in his way of love and compassion, mercy and forgiveness, simply fooling ourselves, living in some *otherworldly* fantasy, out-of-touch with reality, with the way the world really is?

In a time when so much is being questioned, when the behavior and speech of some raises questions about things we have long taken for granted, we have to ask, **what is truth?**

We need to declare what we believe is true: Is honesty important? Are all people accountable to the law? Is there room for mercy and kindness in a law based society and can those laws reflect that? Are all people created equal or is it okay for some people to claim to be above the law? Is it okay for someone to kill a person or have a person killed and not be held accountable for that? Is love for another the greatest power or does "*might make right?*" Are economics more important than justice? Is humility a virtue? And are *virtues* even important? Is the bottom line the only really important thing?

As followers of **Jesus of Nazareth**, the one whom the Church would come to call "**Christ**" and who we in the United Church of Christ, along with others within the wider Church, testify as the "**Head of the Church**", it is incumbent upon us, necessary for us, to *know* what is our **truth**, to *proclaim* that **truth**, and to *live* that **truth**, to the end that the love of God as known in Christ Jesus, might be known to all people and all of God's holy creation.

The **truth of Jesus Christ**, may be seen as strange, ignorant, foolish, naïve, stupid, and perhaps even dangerous, to some. But in a world whose truth is dominated by human acts of cruelty and ruthlessness, by war and famine, by loneliness and loss, grief and pain, self-righteous judgment, name calling and bullying, dishonesty, deceit, greed and the lust for power and control, of hate and mean spiritedness . . . *we* need, the *human species* needs, the *earth* needs, the *entire universe* needs a **truth** that is *out of this world*.

This **truth** of which we speak, this **truth of Jesus Christ**, is none other than the **self-giving, sacrificial love of God**, expressed in the words and life of Christ, who came, *not to be served, but to serve*. It is in living that **truth**, that we and our world may find *faith, hope, love, justice, peace, and joy* and all those things that lead to life abundant. Indeed the **truths** that we know in Jesus Christ are the same **truths** that we find in many of the world's faith traditions. The command to love one another; to treat others as we would have them treat us; to be fair and just in our dealings with one another; to be honest and true; that joy is found in giving; that reconciliation should be sought with repentance and forgiveness; that the true state for the human heart is deep compassion. These are not merely **our truths**, they are indeed **universal truths!** Products of the human condition.

Pilate asked the question, "**What is truth?**" We can never know if he ever understood what Jesus was trying to tell him or if that encounter changed his life. What we can know, is that when we live that **truth**, make it **our truth**, and continue to listen to that **voice of Christ's truth** in our hearts, it is then we will know the *joy and peace* of being **truly human**. Amen.