

Sermon 11-22-09

Psalm 99

John 18:33-37

What Difference Does it Make?

What difference does it make that Jesus Christ is the Lord and king of our lives? We stand up every week and confess this lordship in the Apostle's Creed, we use this kind of language while we're within the walls of the church, but do we really grapple with what this confession means? When we go out into the world, into our day-to-day lives, is the lordship of Jesus something that sits at the forefront of our minds, or does it recede to the back as we get caught up within ebb and flow of our hustle and bustle culture?

As citizens of the United States we have a real struggle when it comes to dealing with this question. Hear me out for a moment. From our very inception as a nation, we have rejected the notion of kingship and kingdoms. Gone from our vocabulary were the designations of lord or king or prince or what have you because it is counter to the democratic spirit that came with the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It was a fear of kingship and kingdoms that led the framers of the Constitution to include the separation of powers between the various branches of government. For over 200 years we have strived to eradicate any understanding of monarchy and kinship from our minds. And so here we stand on the Christ the King Sunday, caught up within a tradition that distrusts kingdoms, forced to grapple with the very presence of God's Kingdom within our midst. I raise this because it is the reality we have to deal with.

What difference does it make that Jesus Christ reigns in power as King over us as the one who Revelation bears witness to, is the Alpha and the Omega; what difference does it make for our lives that Jesus Christ is the one who "loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom?" This is more than a "me and Jesus off in the

corner sharing warm fuzzies” kind of thinking. There is no “buddy-Jesus” who cheers us on and hopes that we make it through life okay. This is the Lord of the Cosmos that we worship; the one who is, who was, and who is to come. This is the Lord God Almighty who penetrated into the depths of our humanity in, through, and as Jesus Christ, taking on what is ours so that we might be transformed; that our lives would be changed from the inside out. What difference does any of this make for our lives as disciples of this King as he forms us into kingdom people?

In all four Gospels, Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews.” Yet, it is only in John that we discover a more detailed account of the interchange between the two men. In John’s Gospel, this is the grand moment of Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus; serving as a moment where the One who is the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth, encounters the local ruler within the Roman Empire. But we might wonder, who is really doing the interrogation?

“Are you the King of the Jews?” Here we have Pilate, the Roman governor in Palestine, investigating a report of insurrection. Pilate represents the might, power, and authority of one of the most efficient empires this world has ever seen. For all intents and purposes, he is free to do with Jesus as he sees fit. And so, in questioning Jesus, Pilate brings all of that authority to bear upon him. Yet, rather than answering Pilate’s question directly, Jesus turns the tables and asks Pilate, “Do you know this on your own, or did someone else put you up to it?” And in that moment, we begin to wonder how free Pilate really is to assert the authority he has. Maybe Pilate fears an insurrection from the Jewish leaders if he lets Jesus go? Maybe he fears the condemnation he will find from his own superiors if he doesn’t keep the land under his care tranquil and quiet? Is Pilate really the one holding all

the cards or are there forces at work that he isn't even aware of? Rather than dealing with Jesus honestly, Pilate attempts to sidestep the question. "I'm not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and priests have handed you over so what have you done wrong?"

Despite Pilate's sidestepping of Jesus' question, Jesus doesn't skip a beat. Bearing witness to his mission and ministry to the world, he proclaims that his kingdom is not of this world; highlighting that its origin is from God and not from the governments of this world. And Jesus goes so far as to point out that those who belong to his kingdom don't raise their arms for violence to assert this kingdom, no one maliciously seeks to enforce it. Rather the kingdom of Jesus Christ is one of love, of hope, of wholeness, and truth. This is Jesus' mission and ministry to the world, as the Lord of the Cosmos standing before Pilate of Rome, to seek and to save the lost sheep who have wandered away from their God; to call all those who are lost, so that upon hearing, they may know the glory of the Lord and the wonders of his grace and be formed into God's kingdom people.

Jesus' mission and ministry is made known to all in the midst of his trial before Pilate, for in that moment we know what kind of king we have; one who would go so far as to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, taking our sin and separation and nailing them to the cross. This is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who loves us, who would gather up our lives and lift them to his Father in heaven, and present us before God as his own people because our lives are found in him.

Today is the Christ the King Sunday, and what makes this day so important is that our thoughts and our minds are directed to the mission and ministry of our living, reigning, active, and present Lord. In celebrating Christ's lordship, we're called to remember all that he has done for us as he savingly encounters us, how he joins us in union with himself out

of the freedom of his love and power, and how he fulfills the promises made of old in his reigning life. He has the victory; he has won our salvation and communion with the living God by inviting us into communion with himself. In Christ, God's kingdom encounters; forming us into a kingdom people with Jesus himself shepherding us as our victorious king beside the still waters of his own making – encountering us to lead us in the midst of his blessed kingdom as he reigns over us even now.

Our King doesn't just claim us on Sunday morning for a few hours but claims the whole of our lives. Every minute, every moment, every breath, and every thought is claimed by our Lord and Savior as he leads us where he will. Whether you're at work or at home, Jesus Christ is Lord. Whether you're stuck in traffic or moving well, Jesus Christ is Lord. Whether you're out shopping, or spending time with family or friends, whatever you're doing and wherever you're at, Jesus Christ is Lord.

Because Jesus reigns as king over us we are his kingdom people and are called to be concerned with his kingdom work. We surrender our ambitions in favor of his will and his way, not because we hope to get something out of it but because that is how he calls us to live. Our King has placed us in this community, not only to be a worshipping community on Sunday mornings, but to be a witness to our community. He invites us to be about his kingdom work through the giving of our time, our talents, and our money. Even now he reigns as Lord over us, not as the leaders and the rulers of this world, who rule with an iron fist and a calculating pragmatism, but with love – calling all those who belong to him to dwell in his truth, to bear witness to his glory, that others may come to know the glory of communion with God. What difference does any of this stuff make in our lives? It's what shapes us, guides us, strengthens us, and prepares us for each and every day as we live into

who Jesus himself has called us to be through our union with him. Jesus Reigns: praise, glory, and honor be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; now and unto ages of ages.

Amen.