

## Where Truth Reigns

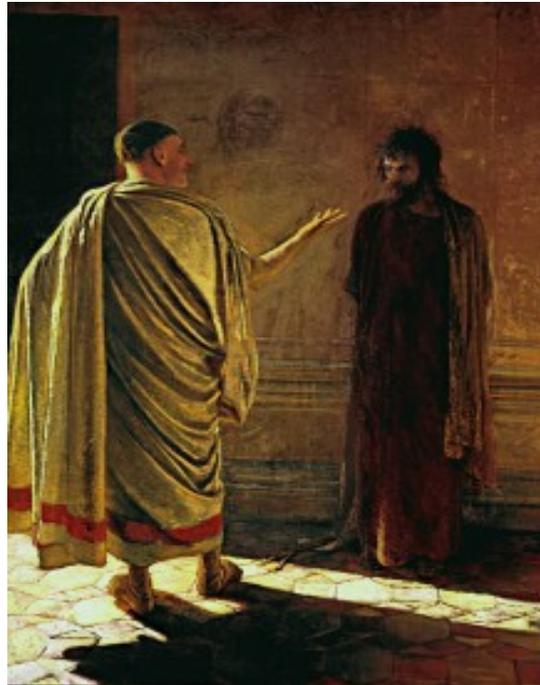
John 18:33-38

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*For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38)*



Truth be told I don't like Christ the King Sunday. It smacks of an outdated triumphal Christian model of hierarchy, power, and domination. This end of the year Sunday, our new year begins next Sunday, came into being through an encyclical or pamphlet published by Pope Pius the XI as a statement to counter the despair at the end of WWI and the rising power of fascist Mussolini in 1925. It was also the year that the KKK marched on Washington and attracted 35,000 White Supremacists. Unwilling to face the terror of the times, the Pope pointed Christians heavenward, a kingdom not of this world, instead of guiding them to resist or seek their salvation through the collective liberation of all.

And then there is the issue of kingdom. For some, our UCC symbol of the cross planted on the world with a crown is a good example of Christ as Lord. For others, it is problematic which is why it has been replaced by the comma, now blue instead of red, swirling through the universe because God is still speaking so never put a period.

Others believe we should get rid of all language and symbols related to kingship because it is outdated in our modern multi-faith world, and because we Christians should no longer claim God's universality in terms of God's presence in the ministry and mission of Jesus of Nazareth in a world of multiple truths. For doesn't saying Christ is King mean that other religion's truths are false or not true? This supersessionism or lack of inclusivity is difficult for those who want to live in a Beloved Community that includes all as equals, as co-creators of God's shalom.

It is for this reason that I find the prayerful poem by the Great Sufi Master Ibn Arabi from 11<sup>th</sup> century Adalusia, Spain most evocative of the love ethic Jesus pointed to in his over 37 descriptions of what the kingdom of God is and isn't.

O Marvel! a garden amidst the flames.

My heart has become capable of every form:

it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,  
and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaa'ba,  
and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Quran.

I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take,  
that is my religion and my faith.

“Whatever way Love’s camels take.” Love is the heart of Jesus’ kingdom, where the salvation of one is tied to the salvation of all on earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom of God that Jesus announced and embodied is what life would be like on earth if God were indeed were our only sovereign. We would have peace building instead of war making, mercy instead of vengeance, love of our neighbors instead of hate.

In a year marked by horrendous acts of violence both here in our country and abroad, we come to this Sunday now named Reign of Christ Sunday to talk about the truth of life in this kin-dom of relationships that Jesus points us toward here on earth, not in heaven. Jesus’ kingdom or kin-dom is not of this world’s values. It is not an imperial kingdom that needs to send soldiers to its borders or arm its citizens; that needs to lock up its youth; that discounts, criminalizes, or murders those who dare to disagree; that cages immigrant children or sells them to sex traffickers. It is not a kingdom that demolishes people’s homes, steals their water, confiscates their land, shoots to maim or kill, or imprisons those who resist. His kin-dom is not of this world yet.

Furthermore, as pastor Nadia Bolz Weber preached in her sermon, *Fall on Your Knees*, “The kingdoms of this world rely on sowing suspicion and authorizing autonomy. The kingdoms of this world depend on individualism and everyone for themselves alone. The kingdoms of this world insist that hierarchy will establish successful rule and that a ladder mentality, that keeps people in their proper places, is the mark of achieving and accomplishing leadership.”

Contrary to this, Jesus’ kin-dom chooses truth as its centerpiece. "I come to testify to the truth." I wonder how in our “post-truth era” what it means to testify or belong to the truth? What does it mean to live in a culture that denies truth’s validity and chooses emotional relativism or fear mongering instead for political gain? What does it mean to live in a democracy that is eroding into a pre-fascist state? How else can we understand a billboard with a picture of our president that says, “We make the Gospel great again,” and “The word became flesh.”

How can we listen to a voice that asks us to abandon the truth and hear Jesus’ voice calling us?

Jesus does not answer Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” He just stands there. For the truth is not a **what** but a **who**, a dark-skinned Palestinian Jew who spent his youth as a refugee in Egypt. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world for it is a truth that chooses the perils and predicaments of becoming flesh over subscribing to imperialistic inclusivity theologies that deny truth and salvation to others.

At the heart then of this apocalyptic season then, is Jesus reigning from a cross for sedition. His death is catastrophic and begets something new. Each one of us who listens to his voice, who follows His Way, will have to face what is false in our lives and the painful but ultimately fruitful revelation of what is true. We will pay a price for this costly discipleship.

God invites us into this season of upheaval to face our own Pilates and their seductive kingdoms of power and domination, to declare our loyalty to the One that is in our heart of hearts where truth lives and reigns.

Listen and you will find the way to the manger where love risks to be born again and again. Listen. Listen to His voice and follow.