

Christ^{the}
King
SUNDAY

Goin' to See
the King



Rev. Dr. Jeff Japinga

Sunday, November 20
9:00am & 11:00am

November 20, 2022 | Christ the King Sunday
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Japinga | Genesis 17:1-8, John 18:33-37

I presume most of you noticed that there was an election a couple weeks ago. Or maybe not. After all, Election Day in Wisconsin was nothing much: just its apocalyptic views of the world—and the other candidate.

Both here and among your neighbors the northwest, where I live, I've found few people neutral about this election.

Some have been angry, others strident; some celebratory, others mournful: and some, simply genuinely, deeply afraid, for their ability to live and work and worship in a way they believed this country afforded them.

But for all an election might stir up in us, there's no election day mentioned on the church calendar. Church calendars don't adjust to national events, like elections, or to national holidays, like the one we celebrate on Thursday.

It's a world-wide calendar, governed by a cycle of readings that starts in Advent; moves through Christmas; walks us through Lent, then Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter, Pentecost, and then a long stretch of what we call "ordinary time," the last Sunday of which is today.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, a relatively new designation first instituted about a century ago by a Roman Catholic pope concerned with the increasing secularization of the world and – see if this sounds familiar – the attention being given over to state elections.

Christ the King.

The Romans described Jesus in derision as King of the Jews, but likely with a thick

layer of fear just below the surface.

Because Jesus came from a people who understood kingship, I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you, their God had told Abraham, and surely the Romans knew that as much as the Jewish people did.

But kings and kingdoms have gotten a bad name in our modern, individualistic sensibilities.

Here in America, we threw tea off of a boat, declared our independence, and fought a war, all because we wanted to take the destiny of the nation, and our individual lives, out of the king's hands and put it into our own.

That we rid ourselves of George the Third doesn't mean we have no Kings in America.

We have Elvis, the King of Rock 'n' Roll. Or the King of Pop, Michael Jackson. There's the Kings of Leon for rock and roll fans, and blues great B.B. King.

There are lots of kings in sports. We have the Los Angeles Kings in hockey, the Sacramento Kings in basketball; LeBron is King James.

King Richard is the HBO film about Richard Williams, the father of tennis greats Serena and Venus.

There are king snakes, kingfishers, king crab, king salmon, chicken a la king.

We've been influenced by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Stephen King, Carole King, Burger King, the Lion King, and the King James Bible, though these days we're more likely to find that dusty on the shelf, if we find it at all.

We actually have lots of kings in our lives. Just no ruler. No one who tells us what to do, no sir, save for me, myself, and I. There's no room for a king in this divisive, individualistic, consumeristic culture of ours.

Or is there? Maybe today's Gospel lesson offers that possibility, even opportunity:

"Are you the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked Jesus.

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world.

And maybe, just maybe, that is the real point of the Christ the King Sunday: that we are not the center of our universe; Christ is.

That it is Christ who strengthens us for whatever will come, and allows us, under the umbrella of his power and protection, to build relationships, to share His grace, across boundaries that might otherwise divide.

Thirty years ago this month, I sat with a circle of believers in a church in the south African township of Soweto. A neighborhood church, perhaps one not so unlike the places your team visited in Guatemala, or maybe even like Covenant.

Except this was the height of apartheid. And I was in a place and in a church the law said I had no business being, to bring support to fellow Christians.

I asked them to share with me a story about their congregation, their ministry.

They looked at each other, no one appearing eager to speak. They conversed a bit in Sotho, a local language.

And then an older woman stood up and, in halting English, said quietly: Last year, our whole church was arrested.

I thought I misheard what she'd said, so I asked her to repeat it.

Our whole church was arrested, she said again, all 250 members, arrested and put in jail – from babies to a 90-year-old man.

"At least babies and mothers were kept together," one of them helpfully added.

The pastor himself was imprisoned for a year.

And why, I asked? Because, she said, and see if this stuns you the way it did me, we believe only Jesus is our king.

Are you a king, Pilate asked Jesus, though I doubt he cared what the answer was.

Are you a king, we may or may not ask Jesus,
And I wonder if we care what the answer is.
Or care what the answer might mean.

Here's what my friends in South Africa – grocers and plumbers, lawyers and accountants, mothers and grandmothers, people in the end not all that different than you and me.

Here's what they said it meant.

We follow a King who was killed for his beliefs and for our salvation, and who taught us to love God and love neighbor; to speak out when love is not shown or when people hate, even if we ourselves might be hated for it.

To take a chance.
To take a stand.
To take a risk.

Not for our own sake, but for the sake of the world. For the sake of the Kingdom.
Christ's kingdom.

Pilate asked Jesus, "So you are a king?" And it's not just a rhetorical question, a convenient turn-of-phrase from the preacher.

The question swirls all around us.

It lurked in the election we just had, and today when we peer so cautiously into the future.

It will be right back in front of us next week as we step into Advent and listen for the voice of the prophet.

It's there as we think about finances and futures, ministry and mission, and who God is calling Covenant Presbyterian Church to be.

What does Christ the King mean for life in a society where selfishness and death and my-way-or-the-highway appear to hold the better hand?

Are you a King, Pilate asked Jesus.

For this I was born, Jesus told Pilate and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

This Sunday, Christ the King Sunday:

Reminds us, amidst the cacophony of our lives,
Reminds us of the truth...

- that we share a loyalty that is higher, deeper, wider, and more profound than any earthly loyalty, and it is one we share with sisters and brothers around the world.

Reminds us of the truth....

- that we bear witness to the vision God holds before us of a new creation, a new heaven and earth, where Jesus is ruler of the kings on earth.

Reminds us of the truth...

- that Christ the King ought to make a difference. In our lives, and in the way we live our lives... to live a little more like Jesus, to speak gracious words that sound like his, to do loving deeds, to realize we are the body of the Risen Christ in the world today, his hands and feet reaching out into the lives of others.

The church year is a funny thing sometimes.

We close it with a King and begin it with a baby born in a barn, and they're the same person.

For this I was born, Jesus told Pilate, and tells you, too; And for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

In the end, we all have to choose, you and me. But here's the thing...

Before you choose, there's one other thing you should know: that your King, Christ the king, has already chosen you.

In the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit, amen.