

Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This past Thanksgiving Eve's text from Matthew chapter six has Jesus telling us to not worry about the clothes we wear. Or the food we eat. And goes as far as telling us to not care what others think about us. But rather, the Son of God – the Son of Humanity – reminds us first to seek the Kingdom of God.

This is where I find comfort, hope, mercy, and grace for this Advent and upcoming Christmas season. We await the return of Jesus' second coming and a newborn baby given to the world.

The month, let us celebrate Jesus as our king. But, for arguments sake, let's be honest here...don't we do this already in every worship we have? Or do we? Do we often take it for granted?

After all, we confess it in in the Lord's Prayer and in the Creeds? And in our Confession and Absolution. Or do we take it for granted and just go through the motions and hope the words in the hymnals save us, not Christ himself. Maybe...just maybe.

When you think of a king, what comes to mind? Royal robes. Abundance. Prejudice. Absolute authority. Lavishness. And in a war or conflict, they certainly are not in the frontlines, are they? No, they are in the back watching from afar. But not our king...he is wearing a plain, dusty white robe. Rides on a donkey. Hangs out with the marginalized...and leads in the front of his ranks asking us to follow him and join him at his cross. That is our king.

This Advent and Christmas season, we seek – we look for – the Kingdom of God, as Jesus continually reminds us to do. He and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate have a civil conversation with one another, just before he is ultimately condemned. They are by themselves, privately, and are talking as two regular men. Now remember here, Pilate can easily let Jesus go...he can be out of the Roman fortress before breakfast time and go back to his life. Pilate finds no fault in this man...no fault at all, and tells the Jewish authorities to judge him with their own laws.

But outside the same people that lauded and cheered for him on the previous Sunday want him dead. "Crucify him!" is what they will soon shout. Though their laws – the same ones we follow even to this day – forbid them from doing so. So they need Pilate, as henchman, to do their work for them. The same man that can let him go eventually condemns him because he is backed into a corner, and is manipulated by the high priests and scribes. And Pilate eventually sends Jesus to his horrifying, but welcomed death.

Pilate asks a simple, but significant question: "Are you the king of the Jews?" And Jesus does not answer outrightly in the affirmative, but says: "My kingdom is not from this world." And Pilate is baffled.

The Kingdom of God, indeed, is not of this world. It is not physical. You cannot touch it. And it is not a place that you can set your GPS to and get there with directions. And yet, it a place we yearn to get to. It is in our hearts. It is in all that we do when our faith pushes us. And it is justly

about us when we seek and let Jesus into our lives. The King of the Jews continues, “If my kingdom were from this world. My followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But alas, it is not from here.” (John 18:36)

So where are his disciples? Where are the multitudes that have followed this man? Where are those whom he has cured diseases? Caused the blind to see? And just raised from the dead? They are nowhere to be seen. “Crucify him!”- That is what remains to be seen.

The conversation continues, and Jesus says to the Roman governor, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone – everyone – who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” And Pilate responds, “What is truth?” (John 18:38)

Truth, indeed. That is why we celebrate Advent and Christmas; it reminds us of who Jesus is and why He is to return. Jesus earlier in John’s gospel tells us in one of his seven “I AM” statements that He is “the way, the truth, and the life.” All must come to him and bow at his glory. All who believe in him as truth have eternal life...both now, and even after they die. And that Jesus is the Word made flesh...which begins the Gospel According to John. The Word from above that comes down from heaven. To live among us. To show us how to live.

Even the prophet Daniel prophesizes and interprets in a dream that the King’s “dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship shall never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:14) And the writer of the Book of Revelation states in the very opening paragraph that the Son of Man as king is the “Alpha and the Omega.” The true beginning and the end. The Lord “who was and is to come, the Almighty.” Revelation 1:8) That foreshadows us a perfect set-up for the Season of Advent that we observe this month of December – for the return of Christ our King who will judge the living, and the dead.

The gospel message we take on in our hearts today explores Jesus, the son of Mary, is not a king that the world would ever recognize...even today. This is a king who serves, rather than being served. This is a king who enters into the holy city of Jerusalem, not triumphantly on a horse, but is seated on a donkey.

Jesus is a king unlike any other king, and his kingdom is unlike any other, for truly – and again the word truth comes from this – is not of this world. What is this kingdom, this reign like? Think about this in your own hearts and minds. That is ultimately what we must reflect on today as we honor in praise and glory, in thanksgiving and in supplication, in Christ as our king.

This text challenges us to answer important questions. Are we willing to accept Jesus as our king? Are you...do you take Christ as your king? Too often, we are tempted by the large stores and stumbling blocks in our faith that take us away from our Christ, and our God – this is the power of secularism. The Target’s, the Walmart’s, the Bed Bath and Beyond’s. The Amazon’s and the technology that we have in our pockets and our purses that are the true gods and kingdoms in our lives. But we must push these aside and make Christ first in our lives, as our king, and our ultimate Redeemer.

Pilate asks, “What is truth?” Truth resides herein the now. Truth resides in our homes, with our families, and in our hearts. In the smile of an innocent child lying in a manger. Or in the hand we hold of dying person we know. Truth is among us when we drive to and from wherever, and at

nighttime when we give thanks in prayer. And truth is there the next day as we watch the sun rise once more as a resurrection gift in our lives. Truth is in the body and blood – the bread and the wine – of the sacrament we call the Lord's Supper. God's will, God's yes, God's reign – walking the earth and being the example of Jesus, and the Spirit living in you. This is truth.

Beloved, Neighbors in Christ, we are a three-point parish of family, friends, and are loved children of God. The ending of all will be like the very beginning of everything, because Christ IS. He is God's Word in creation; He is God's Word forever. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end; A to Z, and everything in between. We are held in this Power, and we will bask in all of His glory, love, grace, forgiveness, and eternal light found with all of the heavenly saints....this is Truth. This is our king.

Merry Christmas to you, the ones I love and serve proudly here on the prairie. And may this Christmastime be the best one yet.

In His sake,

Rev. Erik Karlson
Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish

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