Children bring so much joy to celebrations. Some parents are here to watch their children participate in church activities and performances. We also warmly welcome friends who are attending worship for the first time. Today, besides the Thanksgiving holiday celebrated in American culture, I’d like to introduce a special day on the church calendar. Today is the last Sunday of the church year, also known as Christ the King Sunday.

Next week marks the beginning of a new year on the church calendar. The church year is arranged around the life of Jesus, starting with Advent, the season of waiting for His birth. During the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we prepare our hearts to welcome the birth of the Savior, Christ. We light four purple candles representing "hope, joy, peace, and love." In addition to the rituals during worship, this year we will visit a senior center to share the good news of the Savior’s birth and its significance. Let us anticipate and participate with hearts full of expectation.

**Not of This World**

**呣是屬此世間**

**約翰福音John 18.33-37 11/24/2024**

**Grace Rohrer**

***33****Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”****34****Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”****35****Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”****36****Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to 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.”****37****Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “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 who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”*

***Prayer:* We enter this world, but we are not of this world. We deeply know that we belong to You. Your kingdom is not of this world. May we always submit to the King of Love. May You reign and fill us with the Holy Spirit at this moment. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing and acceptable to You. We pray this relying on our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.**

**Today is the last Sunday of the church year, also known as Christ the King Sunday. When Jesus was crucified, He was mocked, and the charge against Him read, "King of the Jews."**

**The scripture we just read recounts the story of Pilate questioning Jesus. Pilate asked Him the crucial question: "Are you the King of the Jews?" It was a very dramatic and tense moment.**

**Jesus' response was not just directed at Pilate but also to the world and all generations: "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."**

**Jesus articulated His mission and the unique nature of His reign: "My kingdom is not of this world." In essence, His reply was saying, "You don’t understand. My kingdom is not of this world." This is a profound and mysterious statement. What does "My kingdom is not of this world" truly mean? For thousands of years, the Church has worked to interpret this and arrived at several simplified perspectives:**

***A Spiritual Interpretation:* This view suggests that Jesus is not the king of this world but the king of the world to come. He is not a material king but a spiritual king. His reign is not earthly but heavenly. This perspective separates the secular from the spiritual, emphasizing Jesus' spiritual authority. However, this view can overly spiritualize Jesus, making Him disconnected from earthly matters and irrelevant in the here and now.**

**Belief in Jesus governing the afterlife means focusing on the next world. But if we take this strictly, while we trust in Christ’s eternal promise, the declaration "Christ is King" has little impact on this present life. This outlook can lead to what is known as "practical atheism," where Christian faith becomes a utilitarian accessory or even a tool to justify earthly power structures.**

***A Kingdom of Representation:* Another interpretation is that "Jesus is the King of Heaven, but He also governs the earth. As His followers, we represent Him in this world." This understanding implies that we, as His disciples, have the responsibility to uphold His authority by becoming stewards or rulers under His reign. This perspective emphasizes actively maintaining His rule on earth through our own efforts to represent His kingdom.**

**The problem lies in the fact that the Church rarely governs with the fundamental spirit and vision of Jesus Christ—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and gentleness. This interpretation is what we call "triumphalist Christianity," where, in the end, Christian governance becomes no different from secular rule.**

**If we are to celebrate Christ as our King, we must not fall into the traps of either over-spiritualization or triumphalism. Over-spiritualizing Jesus to make Him King, in reality, does not truly make Him King. Triumphalism declares Jesus as King but, in practice, crowns ourselves as rulers. If Christ is King, then everything important must center on Christ’s rule—not ours.**

**You might think of it as being a “backseat driver.” We often like to play the role of God’s backseat driver. Truly letting “Christ be King” means resolving to no longer act as the backseat driver to Christ.**

**Pontius Pilate had no understanding of what it meant for Christ to be King. He feared that a triumphalist king would pose a personal threat, and he viewed Christ’s kingship as a source of trouble. It’s easy to understand why Pilate would want to eliminate such a person. But Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world," meaning His kingdom is entirely different from the one Pilate governed.**

**If we genuinely believe that Christ is King, our lives would look completely different! Pilate’s kingship and Christ’s kingship are worlds apart. Do we see it? Christ’s kingdom and Pilate’s kingdom are fundamentally and profoundly different!**

**Pilate’s kingdom says, "Life is short."**

**You might be like me, often saying, "Life is short and bitter." This mindset often means: "I’m so busy; I must be efficient and not waste time." However, if Christ is King, life is long enough to do good, accomplish important things, discover truth, and appreciate beauty.**

**We say "life is short" because we feel we can’t visit 100 or 1,000 travel destinations before we die, can’t master every skill, or because we feel life isn’t long enough to leave an indelible mark on the world.**

**Without allowing Christ to be King, we feel the need to replace His rule with our own efforts, living anxiously. Are you rushing through your days, constantly busy? Are you trying to cram in more people, more experiences, and more good things? Do you feel like you’re living without room to breathe, trapped in the sense that life is too short?**

**Hear the good news: Christ is the King of time and eternity. He rules over life and everlasting life. He created time and redeems time. In Him, there is always enough time to do what truly matters.**

**Pilate’s kingdom says, "Life is unfair."**

**When faced with injustice, feeling despair and helplessness, we often say, "Life is unfair," and become cynical and bitter. But if Christ is King, justice flows like a never-failing stream, unstoppable and triumphant. Pilate’s kingdom says, "Life is unfair."**

**When we witness terrible injustices and unrelenting oppression, the rulers of this world say that no matter how clumsy or ignorant our actions may be, if force is needed to set things right, we must stop at nothing to form the alliances and gather the power we need.**

**However, in Christ’s kingdom, God says, *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay,"* and the Lord will judge His people. There will indeed be a day of judgment, a great day when justice will be fulfilled. On that day, the Lord will wipe away the tears of the oppressed, bring down warriors from their thrones, and lift up the humble and meek.**

**Do you long for a world of justice and freedom? Is your passion for justice clouded by the frustration that perhaps Christ is unjust, that He is not King? Any justice we create for ourselves is temporary. We can never know all the facts, never fully set everything right, and never restore the past. We cannot reclaim the years devoured by the locusts.**

**But if you find yourself living day by day in cynicism or despair, hear this good news: Christ is Lord and King. He can bring the justice we can never find on our own and demonstrate mercy beyond what we could ever imagine. He is the righteous God.**

**Pilate’s kingdom says, "I take responsibility; I am in control."**

**But if Christ is King, fundamentally, the world is not ours to manage. Our role is not about taking responsibility but about demonstrating faithfulness. The work may look the same, but the attitude is entirely different. It’s not the chest-thumping "I’m in charge" mentality of a boss; it’s the humble servant's mindset of *"I will faithfully fulfill my duty."***

**Faithfulness means living in a way that makes others want to know the source of your freedom, your joy, and your carefree existence. It’s a life filled with peace that surpasses all understanding.**

**Hear this good news: Christ governs the world. He has been at work for a long time. Our job is to live a life that reflects His example, bearing witness to Him. Faith means understanding that our lives and the world were not created, sustained, or corrected by us but by a King who loves us more than we can imagine, who suffered for us, and who desires to build a relationship with us through His life.**

**Next week, we will enter Advent, a season of waiting and reflecting on the meaning of Christ entering the world—“Christmas.” I encourage everyone to engage in sincere devotion. Think of Christ being born into a homeless family, living in an obscure town, becoming a refugee, and spending His time with fishermen, carpenters, lepers, sinners, and rebellious outcasts.**

**Pilate’s kingdom says, "Choice is everything.": In today’s world, consumerism places the highest value on the freedom to choose. We delight in the experience of having options. Want a new outfit? You can choose cotton, linen, or silk—so many choices. House or condo? Taiwan or America? "Having options" is often equated with "having power."**

**Consumer culture works like a drug, flooding our minds with trivial choices and fueling our desire for control. However, if Christ is King, the true meaning of choice is surrender—giving up control. When God made His choice, He gave up His power to choose. God has already chosen—He chose us. If Christ is our King, we’ve already made our choice, and in doing so, we relinquish the need for endless options. Naturally, we love to keep our options open. But God’s choice is not open-ended; He chose us. And if Christ is our King, our choices are not open-ended or completely free because we’ve already chosen Him.**

**Lastly, Pilate’s kingdom says, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."**

**Have you recognized the real issue? The real issue is death. Death seems to destroy the meaning of life.**

**In the face of death, Pilate’s kingdom offers enticing ideas like busyness, justice, responsibility, and choice. Living within Pilate’s kingdom, these ideas feed our desire for control and distract us from the fear of death. They dominate our imagination.**

**But if Christ is King, death no longer reigns. If Christ is King, death is not the end but the beginning. If Christ is King, we don’t need to control, manage, or divert our attention away from death because our lives rest securely in Christ’s hands—the safest hands there are.**

**How does Christ reign? In those dramatic moments of tension, grief, anger, and loss, we call it judgment. Then comes the slow, hard, and gradual progress, which ultimately leads to a climax of excitement and joy as Christ brings us back—until everything is resolved and in eternal harmony. This is the Gospel. This is what it means for Christ to be King.**