

The First Sunday in Advent | St. John 18:33-37
November 29, 2015 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You, we bless and praise You forever, that You sent Your Son to rule over us poor sinners, who for our transgressions justly deserved to remain in the bondage of sin and Satan, and that in Him You gave us a meek and righteous King, who by His death became our Savior from sin and eternal death. We beseech You so to enlighten, govern and direct us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may ever remain faithful to this righteous King and Savior, and not, after the manner of the world, be offended by His humble form and despised Word, but, firmly believing in Him, obtain eternal salvation; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH, p. 147)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read as follows in Jesus' name:

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You over to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But My kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "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." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who rules with all power and authority over heaven and earth, dear fellow redeemed:

The people of Israel wanted a king. Samuel was getting old, his sons were corrupt, and the Israelites wanted to be like all the nations around them. They wanted a king who would settle their disputes and fight their battles. They wanted their king to lead them into prosperity and most important of all, to glory. Samuel warned the people that they would regret this request. They would become slaves to their king and would cry out to the LORD for help, and the LORD would not listen (1Sam. 8:10-18). But the Israelites would not change their minds. The LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them" (8:7).

In other words, the Israelites already had a king. That king was the LORD Himself, the mighty Creator. But they wanted something more tangible, something that would impress their enemies. They wanted the world to know that they were a special people and a force to be

reckoned with. For a time, this is what they got. King Saul was a great military commander who beat back the forces of the surrounding nations (1Sam. 14:47). King David was even greater, and the boundaries of the kingdom of Israel stretched further than ever. Then King Solomon came to power, and even the Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to hear his wisdom and view his riches, which excelled that of *"all the kings of the earth"* (1Kin. 10:23). That was the height of the earthly glory of the kingdom of Israel. After Solomon came a succession of kings who were mostly self-serving and ungodly. The kingdom was divided, its strength faltered, and it was eventually overthrown. Such was the power of its kings.

Still, the request of the Israelites to have a king is understandable. Each one of us has hoped that this President or that President or these legislators will make a difference and get our country back on track. Often we are disappointed. The LORD reminds us in these times of frustration and trouble that we already have a King. He is not a King who looks very powerful or glorious; in fact, He usually seems to be the exact opposite. But this King, our King, has conquered every one of our enemies and rules over all creation. This King is Jesus the Christ, **Whose Kingdom Is Not of the World, but of the Word.**

I

As Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, He did not appear very kingly. He had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane with no more bloodshed than the ear of Malchus being cut off, and that was only a momentary wound. Then He was questioned by the high priest and struck by the officers in the temple court. By the time He got to Pilate, He was tired from a night without sleep, bruised, and seemingly alone with no one advocating for or defending Him.

Now Pilate was tasked with keeping the peace in this little corner of the Roman Empire. There is reason to believe he was a ruthless man, or at least that he was not afraid of a show of force to keep the Jews in line (Lk. 13:1). If he was concerned that Jesus was trying to start a revolt against Caesar, he would have sent Jesus to His death without delay. But Pilate perceived no such threat. *"Are You the King of the Jews?"* he asked Jesus.

Jesus did not answer "yes" or "no." He could have rightly said "no," because He had no designs on reigning over an earthly kingdom of Israel. If He had come to challenge the authority of Caesar in Judah, He would not have come into Jerusalem peacefully. But then He could have also told Pilate "yes." He was *"the King of the Jews,"* in the sense that He was the promised royal heir of David who would rule forever.

Almost 2000 years earlier, when Jacob blessed his sons before his death, He prophesied that *"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples"* (Gen. 49:10). Years later, the prophet Jeremiah recorded these words about the coming King, *"I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely."* (Jer. 33:15-16). Then Zechariah prophesied, *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey"* (Zec. 9:9).

The prophecies built upon each other so that there was a building of anticipation in Israel. No doubt this was only heightened during the time when the Jews were exiled to Babylon. Parents

told their children about this coming King, teachers discussed it with their students, the whole nation waited with longing and hopeful anticipation for this King. Then Jesus began His work. He healed people, He gave them food, He showed great courage. By the time He approached Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, the Israelites knew who He was. They also knew what they wanted Him to be. *"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"* (Jn. 12:13). They correctly connected the Old Testament prophecies to Jesus, but they misunderstood the nature of His reign and kingdom.

If you have ever wondered why God doesn't keep bad people out of political office, why He doesn't give you the peace and prosperity in this world that you want, why He doesn't rain down fire upon all terrorists, why He lets you go through times of trouble and pain and persecution, then you also have misunderstood the nature of Christ's kingdom. His kingdom is not about the kind of earthly success and progress that we can point to and say, "See, there is no King like Jesus. Let all the world bow before Him!" More often than not, Christ's power is hidden to our eyes and the eyes of the world. He seems absent or even uncaring. His people do not look like the favored subjects of an almighty King.

II

But His kingdom is not of the world. He never said it was. He did say that *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (Jn. 16:33). In the world we have trouble, but in Jesus we have peace. Peace of what sort? The Apostle Paul did not describe a life of peace, and yet he also seemed to have a defiant hope: *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed"* (2Cor. 4:8-9). Paul's hope was not in earthly conquest and earthly glory. In another letter he wrote, *"there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing"* (2Tim. 4:8).

By faith Paul saw a Day coming in which the glory of Christ would be seen and experienced by every member of His kingdom. This is the Day that Jesus will come to judge believer and unbeliever, the rich and poor, the powerful and weak. The world's strength will be ruined on that day, its weapons will fall to the ground, its storehouses of treasure and goods will be emptied.

But before that Day happens, the glory and power of Christ's kingdom is hidden. We look for it in the wrong places when we put our hopes in politics and princes and sinful human plans (Ps. 146). We are mistaken if we think this is why Jesus told us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come." The kingdom of God does not come with earthly glory and honor. "The kingdom of God comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity" (Small Catechism explanation).

The kingdom of God comes in this world through the means of grace. That is how Jesus comes among us and reigns as our King. We honor His coming by listening to His Word preached from this pulpit. And we welcome His coming to this altar in the same way the Israelites welcomed Him to Jerusalem, *"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"* This is where our King resides, right here, among us, meeting us even in our lowliness.

He is not a vindictive king who punishes the smallest error, or an arrogant king who has no time for his subjects. He is a humble King, who came not to be served but to serve. He is a gracious King, who offered His own life to redeem the lives of the worst sinners. And He is a powerful King, who has already defeated the greatest enemies humankind has ever faced: sin, devil, and death. Jesus is like no other king in history. In truth, no other king in history is worth mentioning compared to Him.

If it seems good to you to follow this King, understand that it will be no easy journey. More often than not, you will have suffering instead of glory and pain instead of peace. But a crown of glory and honor waits for you. Jesus your King won it for you by His life of perfect obedience in your place and His victory over your sin and death. He promises that you will be part of a greater kingdom than Solomon's or any other kingdom the world can dream of. And while you stumble along here, He promises that His voice will guide you. Through His living and active Word, He brings you the forgiveness and grace that characterizes those who are blessed by Him. Behold, your King comes to you now through His Word, and He will return in all His glory to lead you out of this world of sin and into His heavenly kingdom.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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He comes to judge the nations,
A terror to His foes,
A Light of consolations
And blessed Hope to those
Who love the Lord's appearing,
O glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth Thy beams so cheering,
And guide us safely home!
(P. Gerhardt, ELH #94, v. 10)