

In Nomine Iesu

The First Sunday of Advent 2022

Are you preparing for Christmas or just for the Holidays? - John 18:33-37

“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 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.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the promised King. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

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Well, the rush has begun. The Christmas tree lots are full of trees, but already the numbers are diminishing as one car after another heads homeward with a tree tied to its top, and probably full of other things too. Everyone, it seems, is preparing for the holidays. Are you? Or are you preparing for Christmas? Let's look at things differently than the world. Let's prepare for Christmas.

I

Jesus is a king. What does this mean? We think of a king as one who has great power. A king has control; he has wealth, an army; and he can use his power to achieve what he wants. There is no one higher in his country than the king. Everyone else is subordinate. The subjects of the king must do his bidding or fear his wrath. This is what Pontius Pilate would have thought as he heard Jesus of Nazareth called a king. But is this our King?

On the first Palm Sunday it sure looked like it. Jesus is cheered by a huge crowd. They cry out to Him to save them: “Hosanna!” They shout that He comes in the name of the Lord. They hail him as the promised son of David. But He does not look like a king. He comes to Jerusalem almost alone. No army marches with Him. There is no evidence of power, much less of wealth. He rides no horse or camel - sure signs of the rich and powerful. No, He rides a small donkey.

Five days later Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. No crowd cheers Him. No one begs Him for help. Instead He has been arrested, accused, jailed, beaten. The leaders of His people want Him dead, as the crowd no longer cheers but jeers Him. Pilate states the ugly truth, “Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me.” To Pilate, it doesn't even look as if Jesus has a country to be king of. It doesn't look like He has any to defend and support Him as king, only a few women, a teenage boy. He stands totally helpless before Pilate. What kind of king is He? No wonder Pilate is confused, even though he was probably very well informed, as military governors almost always are. Afterall, the Romans did not come to both gain and maintain control over their huge empire, the greatest ever seen, by incompetence and ignorance. “So you are a king?” He asks.

“My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus answers. Simple, straightforward, clear, and completely **incomprehensible** to Pilate. Jesus’ kingdom is different, out of this world different. It is not a kingdom defined by borders, nor guarded by fortresses, walls, and armies ... the only kind of kingdom Pilate had ever seen or imagined. It has no police. It executes no one. Jesus’ kingdom does not have an agenda like that of any worldly kingdom. Jesus’ kingdom is a kingdom of truth. And all who dwell in His kingdom hear Him, because He speaks truth.

Remember, just one day before Jesus had told Thomas: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.” Jesus is the truth. He is opposed to the “lie.” What lie? The lie that was first spoken to Eve when Satan said: “You can be like God.” This lie, the oldest, boldest, most successful lie ever told, continues to bring ruin and death to people of every race and country. This lie is at the heart of all human attempts to transcend this world of sickness, poverty, war, and death, ignoring its real cause, and establish a perfect kingdom on earth ... all human attempts, every one of which has failed.

When Jesus tells Pilate: “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,” He is telling Pilate what the nature of His kingdom is. He is telling Pilate why He stands before him defenseless, forlorn, as good as dead ... and yet actually on the very cusp of a victory so complete, so total, that it will overcome the divine emperor of Rome himself before he could even realize it. Nor did the originator of the oldest, boldest, most successful lie in the world, Satan, see it coming. His proud arrogance, blind self-confidence would not allow him to see or believe the hollowness of his own lie. And it so was that the mighty Roman empire itself would surrender to this forlorn King who stands before one of its most insignificant governors. How could Pilate understand? How could anyone grasp the full extent of what is coming at this point, the complete and utter defeat of sin, death, and hell?

II

Thomas, to whom Jesus first said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” did not grasp it, and so hid in fear, as did the others of the small band that had gathered in the upper room the night before. One had even committed suicide in his despair and hopelessness. For you see, the kingdom of this King is dependent upon Jesus, upon His witness, upon His voice. Without His voice there is no kingdom. Without the voice of Jesus there is no truth. That is why the only kingdom that lasts is that of Jesus, no other kingdom will stand.

They will all fall. But not through the power of the sword. The kingdom of Jesus does not come when people decide to take up arms and fight for the right. That is why Jesus told Peter to put away his sword. It is why Jesus tells Pilate: “if My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting.” The kingdom of Jesus will not come if we are able to get all the right laws passed and obey them, nor will it be hindered if all the wrong laws are passed. The kingdom of Jesus will not come when the nation of Israel is safe from her enemies. It will not come when all the nations of the world really are the united nations. These are all kingdom of the world issues. They have importance to some extent. They impact us in ways we

can see and feel. But they have no eternal effect on us. And they will all disappear when this now humble King appears once more in glory to claim the kingdom He suffered and died to win for us.

It is the voice of Jesus that brings truth. Where the truth is, there you will find the kingdom of Jesus. Remember the 2nd Petition of the Lord's Prayer: **Thy Kingdom come.** *What does this mean?* The kingdom of God certainly comes of itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. *How does God's kingdom come?* 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.

The voice of Jesus is the Word of God, for He is Himself the Word made flesh. And the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God so that we believe the Word, believe the truth, and live godly lives that reflect the truth.

It is easy to become seduced by the ways of this world and its kingdoms. It is easy to think of the kingdom of Jesus in terms that apply to this world, and not to the truth He proclaims. Think of the churches that are attractive to the world. They are the churches where you can be influential in your community through the contacts you make there. They are the churches that have great outward displays of prestige. If you were to list influential churches around here, the ones people join in order to make good business and social connections, which are these? I think you know.

So, we are tempted to question the rightness of what we believe and teach when it looks like we are less than so many others. But our appearance counts for nothing. What counts is that we continue to spread the truth, to preach Christ - who alone is the way, the truth, and the life - we continue to pray that the kingdom of God will grow as still more hear and believe in the King. The point is simply this: don't **look** at outward things, no, **listen** to the voice of our King, as He said. His voice alone defines the Christian Church, the kingdom of God, which endures forever and ever.

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Today we begin a new church year. Today is the start of the season of Advent, the time of preparation for the great festival of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, and Son of the virgin Mary. In these days before Christmas we listen again to Jesus, and in listening, prepare our hearts and minds to welcome Him as He comes to us, calling us to Himself. So, put aside the seduction of the kingdoms of this world, with all their riches and power, put aside the way of the world, and gather around the Word of God, the voice of Jesus. And listen. Listen.

Dear friends, Jesus truly is our king, who stands alone and forlorn before Pilate as the cross looms behind Him, but with it the great victory over sin, death, and hell that is coming. Let us listen to His word, and so prepare not just for the holidays, but rather for Christmas, and birth of our Savior King, who will set us free from sin and all that is wrong in the world. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria