

### ***John 18:33-37 The Message (MSG)***

<sup>33</sup> Pilate went back into the palace and called for Jesus. He said, “Are you the ‘King of the Jews’?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you this about me?”

<sup>35</sup> Pilate said, “Do I look like a Jew? Your people and your high priests turned you over to me. What did you do?”

<sup>36</sup> “My kingdom,” said Jesus, “doesn’t consist of what you see around you. If it did, my followers would fight so that I wouldn’t be handed over to the Jews. But I’m not that kind of king, not the world’s kind of king.”

<sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said, “So, are you a king or not?”

Jesus answered, “You tell me.

Because I am King, I was born and entered the world so that I could witness to the truth.

Everyone who cares for truth, who has any feeling for the truth, recognizes my voice.”

Reign of Christ Sunday is a relatively new celebration in the church. Just after World War One this Sunday was declared "Christ the King Sunday" by the Pope. It is suggested that this was a way of reminding people of the power of God's love. It was a call to put Christ/God first in our lives.

As Jesus, God came to us in human flesh. So the Reign of Christ could also be restated to be the "Reign of God" or "the Kingdom of God". Kingdom was a word that helped people understand what God's world could be...a place to belong, a place with rules to guide their living. But Kingdom isn't always a good place. We have seen kings and leaders miss-use power, abuse people, enslave them instead of empower them, create rules that put people in danger and deny them basic rights.

In today's language, which seeks to embrace the presence of God as accompaniment in all of our living, we often speak of the Kin-dom of God emphasizing that we are family: sisters and brothers of faith living together around the world.

As people of faith, followers of the Way of Jesus, it is important that we listen to the stories, the teachings the guidance of God and then that we put those things into action in our daily living. Every generation listens to those stories to understand how it is that God would have us live. Our most beloved and challenging resource to determine God's direction is Jesus.

In the Song of Faith we were reminded of many stories of Jesus but also of his circumstances: where he lived, how he lived. His was not a cozy upbringing. He lived through power struggles. He lived through being judged for what he looked like not who he was. He lived a life of homelessness being dependant on others for his food, his clothing, his safety. He spoke out for those in need...knowing that his words challenged everyone else around him. He spoke out because it was right and just, obviously not because it would make him popular, and because God said this is what you do when you live love in the world.

In the interaction that we see between Jesus and Pilate, we see two people of opposing views and positions in the world coming face to face. For Pilate, this Jesus who spoke up for justice, would have been a political nightmare. The naming of Jesus as King was a huge issue. If Jesus was trying to usurp Royalty Pilate would have to fix it and Pilate's job hinged on him being in control. So it might have come as some relief when Jesus said that the kingdom he was working for wasn't the one Pilate was working for. But... if the people were dissatisfied with Pilate's work and were asking for some kind of judgement, his position was still threatened. No matter what he chose in this instance, Pilate was stuck and his position and livelihood would be in danger.

So he chose to side with the noisiest group. He gave into the pressure and, as a result, lives were lost, violence won and no-one was really happy with the outcome.

In this scenario, our image of Jesus is one of a man who knew that what he was working for was right. He knew that, suggesting that people live by the power of love, caring for each other, looking out for the desperate, the displaced wasn't politically correct. He knew that this was stretching imaginations and boundaries in new ways but he knew that this was the way of peace. Jesus told Pilate that the kingdom he was part of was based on truth. In God's kingdom the truth of love is the foundation of belonging, it guides living.

God challenged the secular institutions to be more than politically correct. Jesus challenged Pilate to name what he really thought and knew – and Pilate shows us how hard it is to look at ourselves – especially when we're under pressure and how hard it is to truly live our faith

Jesus says to Pilate are you making your own decisions or are you bowing to pressure? What has influenced you to get here? Did you research your facts? Are you basing your conclusions on hearsay? Who are you looking out for – yourself or the people you are charged with caring for?

Jesus shows us such loyalty, such determination to live God's kingdom when he continues to do what is right– to challenge lies – to uncover truth so that others are freed. We see his courage, his faith in God's way and his love for the sake of others.

We can feel a sense of déjà vu in the world. Jesus is standing before us knocking on the door of our hearts and asking us for help for the weary, the hungry, the homeless, the victims of war. We can feel the confusion, the frustration, the dilemma of Pilate. Like Pilate we find ourselves deciding which way do we choose? Do we protect our own positions? Do we look after others? Who should we choose first? Why can't it be easy?

We don't all have to choose the same thing... in fact, if we don't more of God's children around the world will feel the care and compassion of the Way of Jesus. If your heart says help our Veterans... do it. If your heart says help the homeless in our province, in our towns...do it. If your heart calls you to help the starving children across the globe... do it.

Jesus told Pilate...that the preparation for the Kingdom of God begins here and now.  
Here we are to listen for the words of truth,  
here we are to live the words of love,  
here we are to stand our ground  
and not let anyone chose our words or our position for us based on fear,  
here we are to know our heart and ground it in God.

Let's take time to look at the stories and teachings of Jesus. Let's look at the world around us and think of where God and Jesus are calling us to live love in the world.

Go back to some of those stirring images  
that remind us of God's determination  
to live amongst us, to experience what we experience,  
coming as Jesus to be with those who need love and compassion the most.  
Where have you seen Jesus in action?  
Where have you heard the voice of Jesus saying –  
“if you do it for them you do it for me.”?  
Where have you heard Jesus say, as he implied to a rich man:  
“without your heart involved it's not enough”?  
How are we bringing the kin-dom of God a little bit closer to the world?  
In the song of faith, we hear:  
“By becoming flesh in Jesus,  
God makes all things new.  
In Jesus' life, teaching, and self-offering,  
God empowers us to live in love.”  
May it be so.

