

CHRIST OUR KING**Sermon for the 5th Sunday after the Epiphany, 2020****John 18:36-37**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

As we finish our series of sermons on the Doctrine of Jesus, today we dwell on the fact that Jesus is our King. Therefore, our text is taken from John 18:36-37: **Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If My kingdom belonged to this world, My attendants would fight, to prevent Me from being handed over to the Jews. However, now My kingdom is not from here.”**

³⁷ **Therefore, Pilate asked Him, “Then are You a king?”**

Jesus answered, “You are correct in saying that I am a king. I have been born for this reason and have come into the world for this reason, that I may testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the Apostles’ Creed, we call Christ God’s “*only Son, our Lord*.” With these words, we confess the deity of Christ. The same truth is confessed when the Christian Church, in its teaching, speaks of Jesus as King. How could we refuse Him this title? He is with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Creator and Preserver of the world.¹ All things belong to Him, and whatever lives and exists owes Him obedience. Also, even in the *state of humiliation*, when He walked this earth in the form of a servant, He was Master of all things. Remember how the wind and the waves obeyed Him, how people were healed of their diseases, and how some were even raised from the dead? Evidently, He has a kingdom to which everything that was created belongs. However, if we were to stop here, we would only be telling a part of what is to be said on this subject. Christ Jesus is King in a very special sense and has a kingdom which belongs to Him in a very peculiar way. This is what we shall touch upon today.

Our text today forms part of the greatest scenes in history as we find Jesus shackled as some sort of horrible prisoner, standing before Pilate, a powerful Roman official. It is a striking contrast. Yet it is not Pilate, but Jesus who says that He is a King. ³⁷ **Therefore, Pilate asked Him, “Then are You a king?”**

Jesus answered, “You are correct in saying that I am a king.”

In making this statement, although He is a king, Jesus was not threatening the Roman Empire’s external rule. He rejected any worldly political aspirations or rebellious intent. If Jesus had been establishing a political kingdom, He would have encouraged His disciples to fight to establish it, but He didn’t do this. He said, “**If My kingdom belonged to this world, My attendants would fight, to prevent Me from being handed over to the Jews. However, now My kingdom is not from here.**” If Pilate thought that he was dealing with a nationalistic, half-demented fanatic aspiring to royal honours, then these words must have corrected him of that notion. Jesus goes on to say, “**I have been born for this reason and have come into the world for this reason, that I may testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.**” Jesus had come to testify to the truth. He was a King of a very peculiar kind, a spiritual King who ruled by proclaiming the truth. Other kings would govern through their armies or through institutions that were well established by the laws of their nation. David had a mighty military force who were well trained with Joab at the head, through which he exerted his kingly power. Tiberius, who was the Roman emperor when Jesus stood before Pilate, had under him a vast host of officials who would do his bidding, as well as a great army and navy to enforce his orders. But this King had nothing of that sort to point to. He performed His work by means of the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to Jesus’ voice and follows Him as King, just as the sheep follow the shepherd.²

There is only one truth, one reality, namely, the truth embodied in Jesus Christ. As the Word from eternity, He has created all that we see as real. As the One sent from the Father, He has come to restore the truth of God’s love and salvation for all. As the Way, the Truth, and the Life³, He has come to bring us into God’s kingdom and to send His Spirit of truth to keep us in His way, and notice again how we learn this truth and become part of Jesus’ kingdom: we listen to Him.

At one time, Jesus passed the booth of a tax-collector by the name of Matthew, and said to Him, “*Follow Me!*”

¹ John 1:2; Hebrews 1:3

² John 10:27

³ John 14:6

Immediately Matthew follows Jesus and becomes a devoted disciple.⁴ The Word spoken by this King overcomes any opposition in the heart of this tax-collector and makes him follow the divine Master. Again, Jesus preached His message, and a woman who was a sinner came and, weeping tears of joy, in gratitude moistened His feet with her tears and dried them with the hairs of her head, before pouring fragrant oil on them.⁵ Jesus preached in the synagogue, and all were amazed at His teaching, acknowledging that He was teaching “*as one who had authority and not as the scribes taught*” (Mark 1:22). Although there was nothing to show that Jesus was of royal status, no kingly garments or rings on His fingers, no grand palace or a host of servants carrying out His every command, yet by His Word alone which He spoke, He was truly powerful.

What a kind and gentle King! A King who is the complete opposite to someone like King Herod who had murdered and oppressed people in order to hold his subjects in check and to exact obedience. Not Jesus, this King merely speaks. In that way, He influences people and carries out His design.

As Jesus rules, He benefits and blesses. Pilate, representing his imperial master, had governed for the benefit of the emperor of Rome. Think of the vast sums of money which yearly must have been sent to Rome from Judea in the form of taxes and customs. Rome was growing immensely rich at the expense of the conquered provinces. But of the true King standing before Pilate, nothing of the kind could be said. Instead of enriching Himself, He was content with absolute poverty.⁶ Neither does He rob or plunder. Instead, He blesses; He bestows the truth about God, about us, about the hereafter, about the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

We may be assured that the words He spoke back then apply just as much today and that it is in this manner in which *He still rules and blesses*. Though He now is exalted from the low estate in which the Passion story puts Him before us, He is still governing in His gentle way. He still comes to us in the Word, and there tugs at our heart-strings to influence us. He comes in Holy Baptism and in the Lord’s Supper, and in these means of grace exerts His power. His Word is as mighty as ever. Through the Word, hearts are conquered, unbelievers are changed into believers, and sinners into saints. He still bestows the truth and leads men and women who are weary and heavy-laden to rest in the peace of God which passes all understanding.⁷ And remember, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever*” (Hebrews 13:8).

From the King we now turn to the kingdom.

Pilate must have been just as startled by what the quiet, calm Person before him said of His kingdom as of His being a King. This man named Jesus may pretend to be a king, but it seemed plain to Pilate that He had no kingdom. How he must have been amazed when he heard Jesus say that He had a kingdom even then when His only possessions seemed to be the clothes He was wearing, and where were His loyal subjects? Yet His words made it clear that He was not a King without a kingdom. “**My kingdom does not belong to this world**” Jesus said. It is not a kingdom having its origin in man or possessing the same characteristics as the kingdoms of the world.

It is evident at once that this kingdom is not a geographical entity which may be located on the map. Geography, the place where you live, the country to which you belong, the degree of longitude or latitude, has nothing to do with belonging to this kingdom.

It is evident furthermore that this kingdom is not a national entity. Today the politics of race is a big thing. So many people are called out for being racist in what they say and so on, and many politicians and people of note use arguments about race to further their own causes. In Christ’s kingdom, however, race does not play a role in making one a subject of it. The Jews indeed thought that the Messiah would establish a national kingdom like that of David and Solomon. Jesus indicated very plainly that His kingdom was not intended to satisfy the national aspirations of any group or people, but everyone. What else could “*all nations*” mean when Jesus asks us to make disciples and to baptise?⁸

It is evident that this kingdom is altogether spiritual. There are no external requisites which the King insists on as He receives subjects. Age, wealth, learning, education, mental capacity, whether you are black or white - all these things do not come into consideration here. Only one thing is insisted on: Whoever wishes to be a subject in this kingdom must hear the Word proclaimed and humbly believe in this King.

There is no one in this kingdom who does not wish to be there. Citizenship here on earth is not always voluntary. Many people are citizens of a country from whose dominion they would like to be freed. Such is not the situation with respect to

⁴ Matthew 9:9

⁵ Luke 7:37-38

⁶ Luke 9:58

⁷ Philippians 4:7

⁸ Matthew 28:19

anyone in the kingdom of Christ. Whoever is in it is in it willingly, gladly, and rejoicingly.

We call it an invisible kingdom because that which makes one a subject of it, acceptance of the Word of Christ, faith in Him as the Redeemer, is an invisible matter. There is only One who knows the citizens and who and does take a census of them. *The Lord knows those who are His.*⁹

Dear friends, even though invisible, this kingdom is the greatest force in the world. Its citizens continue to spread the Word of Truth which their King proclaims, and trust that the Holy Spirit works in the spoken Word to bring salvation to their fellow-men. It is on account of this kingdom and its message that the world is still continuing.

The greatest question for anybody to ask is: “*Am I a citizen of this grand and glorious kingdom of Christ, acknowledging Him as my royal Master, believing His Word in true faith, and placing my trust in the great work which He has accomplished?*” We began our sermon this morning by quoting from the Second Article of the Creed, taking note of Christ as being God’s “*only Son our Lord,*” so perhaps a good answer to this question is the explanation of the Second Article in our Catechism, namely, “*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.*” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Father in heaven, we who are Your children by grace pray that Your kingdom may come. We thank and praise You that You have revealed Jesus as Lord and Christ, and as King for evermore. We pray that His rule may be established from sea to sea and from the rising to the setting of the sun, that every nation, people, and tribe may confess that He is Lord, to Your glory. We thank You that, though He is King of kings, He humbled Himself and became our servant, so that He might be our Saviour, able to save all who come to You through Him.

Gracious Father, You do not enjoy seeing sinners die, but would rather see them turn from their sinning and live. Therefore spread the Gospel, and extend Your kingdom among all nations on earth. Cause the mighty to bow before Jesus their Lord, and teach all people to know that there is healing and saving power only in Him.

Although we rejoice that Your kingdom is already with us, make it come with fresh power and new blessing into our lives. Make the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts, and move us to thankfulness and praise. Give us increased trust in Your Word and obedience to Your commandments. Give us grace to be humble, merciful, kind, and forgiving. Make Christ’s message in all its richness live in our hearts and direct all we do and say. Grant that we, redeemed in body and spirit, may be dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Lead us to rejoice in Your grace, and to give thanks for Your mercy day by day.

We pray for Your Church on earth. Keep it from weakness and error, from unfaithful shepherds and false teachers. Protect us from heresy and division. Defend us from the lies of Satan and from the schemes of godless men. Make Your Church secure against the powers of hell. Teach Your people to be patient in hope, firm in trust, and faithful in prayer, until that day comes when You send Your angels to gather Your own into Your everlasting kingdom.

Comfort those who are cast down. Give patience to the sick, peace to the anxious, strength to the weak, help to the needy, and forgiveness to the repentant.

Pour out Your mercy on us all, and teach us to set our hearts on things above, where Christ our Lord lives and reigns. In His holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Isaiah 40:21-31

²¹ Do you not know? Do you not hear? Have you not been told from the beginning? Have you not understood the foundations of the earth? ²² He is the One who is enthroned above the circle of the earth and those who live

on it are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a veil and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He reduces princes to nothing. He has made the rulers of the earth worthless. ²⁴ Indeed, they have hardly been planted, they have hardly been sown and their stem has hardly taken root in the ground, when He has blown on them,

⁹ 2 Timothy 2:19

they have dried out and a windstorm carries them away like stubble.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare Me, that I should be equal to him?” asks the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see! Who has created these? He brings out their army by number. He calls them all by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. ²⁷ Jacob, why do you say and Israel, why do you complain, “My way has been hidden from the LORD and my just claim is disregarded by my God”? ²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not become tired or weary. His understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹ He gives power to weary people and He increases the strength of those who have no vigour. ³⁰ Even young people will become tired and weary and young men will in-deed stumble; ³¹ but those who wait on the LORD will receive new strength. They will cause their feathers to grow like eagles. They will run and not become weary. They will walk and not grow tired.

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

¹⁶ If I tell the Good News, I have nothing to boast about, because I am compelled to preach it. How terrible for me if I do not tell the Good News! ¹⁷ For, if I do it because I want to do it, I receive a reward. However, if I do not want to do it, I still have this work entrusted to me.

¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: That when I tell the Good News, I shall not let the Good News cost anyone anything, so that I may not take advantage of my authority in the Good News.

¹⁹ For, although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order that I may win more. ²⁰ To the Jews I have become like a Jew, that I may win Jews. To those who are under the Law I have become like one under the Law, although I myself am not under the Law, that I may win those who are under the Law. ²¹ To those who are without the Law I have become like one who is without Law, although I am not without God’s Law, but

am under Christ’s law —, that I may win those who are without the Law. ²² To weak persons I have become a weak person, that I may win those who are weak. I have become all things to all people, that in every way I may save some. ²³ I am doing everything because of the Good News, that I may become a participant in it. ²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one wins the prize? Run in such a way that you may win! ²⁵ Everyone who enters an athletic contest goes into strict training. Now, they do it to win a wreath that withers, but we do it to win one that never withers. ²⁶ Therefore, I am not like one who runs aimlessly. I do not box like one who beats the air. ²⁷ Rather, I treat my body roughly and make it my slave, so that, after I have been a herald to others, I myself may not be disqualified.

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ Immediately after they left the synagogue, they went into the home of Simon and Andrew, together with James and John. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was lying down with a fever and they told Jesus about her at once. ³¹ He went to her, took her hand and lifted her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them.

³² In the evening, when the sun had set, people kept bringing to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. ³³ The whole city had gathered at the door. ³⁴ Jesus healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons, but He would not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went away to a lonely place and there He prayed. ³⁶ Simon and those who were with him searched for Him. ³⁷ When they found Him, they told Him, “Everyone is looking for You.”

³⁸ He told them, “Let us go somewhere else, to the small towns that are near, so that I may preach there also! For I have come forth for this purpose.”

³⁹ He went and preached in their synagogues everywhere in Galilee and drove out the demons.