

November 22nd, Christ the King Sunday

Pastor Arndt

Revelation 1: 4b - 8

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” 7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”

In Christ Jesus,

Jesus Christ stands on trial before Pontius Pilate. Pilate is hopelessly confused. He is trying to understand the vitriol and the hate that is spewing from the crowd towards Jesus. *“He claims to be the Messiah!”* the people shout. But Pilate doesn’t know what a Messiah is. *“He [Jesus] stirs up people with his teachings”* they say. But Pilate was confused by Judaism and its teachings just as much as the Jews were. But then something clicks. *“He claims to be a king”* they say. A lightbulb lights up in Pilate’s head.

Pilate may have been fuzzy on what a Messiah, Christ, Savior, or God was... but a king... Pilate knew what a king was. Pilate rubbed elbows with king Herod. Pilate’s paycheck was signed by Caesar. Finally, Pilate has a frame of reference to understand Jesus. You’re like Herod! You’re like Caesar! The problem is every human analogy that we use to describe Jesus falls short.

We’re not going to understand Jesus by comparing him to the British Royal family, or a Disney Cartoon, or a Medieval king from Europe. This morning Jesus invites us to take every preconceived notion that we have about kings and throw them away. Instead, we turn to the words of Jesus himself in Revelation. There he teaches us, *“The truth is I’m not ‘a king’”*.

This is who I Am

Our lesson begins with God introducing himself. Typically, it sounds something like this, *“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* But here we find something different.

God the Father is *“the One who Is, and was, and is to come”*. It’s a wonderful paraphrase of God’s name *“I Am”*. The Holy Spirit is *“The seven spirits before His [the Father’s] throne.”* But then we come to Jesus. He comes last. *“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”*

The Faithful Witness

Religion to Pilate is frustrating. The Jews are screaming at him in one ear about temple rituals and prophecies. His superstitious wife is in his other ear talking about dreams and premonitions. The noise is unbearable. A beleaguered Pilate turns to Jesus and asks, *“What is truth?”*

With a hurricane around him, for a moment Pilate finds himself in the calm eye of the storm. Standing before him is Jesus *“The Faithful Witness”*.

Notice the effect that Jesus has on people. They come to him with confusion and anxiety. The disciples walking on the way to Emmaus have heard so many things from so many people. What are we supposed to believe? But Jesus calms them. The disciples feel a warm glow within them as Jesus takes them to Scripture and shows that these Scriptures all point to him... the one walking beside them.

Nothing in this world speaks with such knowledge. There is no human voice that you’ve heard that speaks to you with such understanding. Jesus is not like some guy who said something. He is your faithful witness who brings you calm in the eye of the storm.

And what is his message that calms you?...

The firstborn from the dead

Jesus is “the firstborn from the dead.”

Pilate, like the rest of the world, was oblivious to what the death of Jesus was all about. As a Roman, Pilate probably entertained thoughts of the “afterlife”, but to him such thoughts would have been entirely unexciting. Life is the good part. The “afterlife” is the undesirable that comes next.

A child is born into this world by way of a mother’s pain. The joys of this life are stifled and compressed by pain. When life comes to an end it causes not only physical but emotional pain. That is the world into which Jesus was born. He stands before Pilate waiting to die. Why? Jesus brings us something better.

Last week we heard about Lazarus. When Lazarus was born to eternal life there was no pain. He was carried by angels to heaven. Lazarus was an insignificant soul on earth, yet in heaven he enjoys the close company of Abraham. In heaven there is no sin nor its effects to stifle his joy. There is no time to compress his joy or bring it to a close. The only effect of time is the knowledge that someday his joys will increase when God reunites him with a resurrection body and gives him a new paradise to enjoy for eternity.

The kingdom of Jesus is not of this world. Thank God for that! By his pain you will be born to eternal life.

King of Kings

Looking at kings is not going to help us understand Jesus. People serve kings. Jesus loves us and becomes servant of all. What do kings do with sin? They punish it. Jesus forgives sins. People die for kings. Jesus dies for us and frees us from sin with his own blood.

Comparing Jesus to kings will only confuse us. Instead, kings need to be compared to Jesus. This is where we come into the picture.

“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”

You are members of a kingdom in which all your actions flow from the King who has loved you and redeemed you. Don't try to understand Jesus by looking at kings. Understand your life, by looking at Jesus.

-Amen