

Sermon for Nov. 21, 2021—"The Voice of Truth"

Christ the King Sunday, Year B—Texts: Revelation 1:1-8; John 18:33-38

Anyone looked at a calendar lately?

I mention it because we've got a lot going on today and in the days ahead. What do I mean? Well, let's take a look: In no particular order, today is Stewardship Sunday, which, I admit, we really didn't make much of a fuss this year.

Coming up this week—Thursday to be exact—we've got Thanksgiving Day. And of course, the very next day is Black Friday—the **unofficial** beginning of the Christmas season. Just a few days after that, next Sunday, the 28th, is the first Sunday in Advent, the **official** start of the Christmas season. That's quite a full plate by any measure—wouldn't you say? But wait—there's more! On top of everything else, it's also Christ the King Sunday which marks the end of the church calendar year.

I'm thinking about all this when I discover that our gospel reading today would be from John's Passion narrative, and one of the other readings was from the Book of Revelation. Is it just me, or does it seem somewhat strange that with everything going on we should be reading from the account of Jesus' final hours, and from what many believe is a foretelling of the end of the world? That these should be today's lectionary readings? I don't know. But I don't think it's a coincidence.

In any event, in the gospel reading, an encounter takes place between Roman governor Pontius Pilate and Jesus. I call it an "encounter," rather than "trial," largely because it's not a trial in our present sense of the word. There's no justice to be found here. The outcome is never in doubt. What is in doubt is who exactly is "on trial" here. It's not Jesus. It's Pontius Pilate, and—quite frankly—he doesn't fare all that well.

It began after Pilate enters his headquarters, summons Jesus, and asks him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" What happens then, in this relatively brief encounter, is a back and forth over whether Jesus is a king, and exactly what that means. Finally, Pilate asks, "So you are a king?" Jesus answers, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And then Pilate asks **the** question. "What is truth?" "What. Is. Truth?" Good question. Great question.

What's interesting is that the scene actually takes place in two places. If we were doing it as a stage play, the stage would be split in two. One half would be occupied by Pilate's headquarters, the other half would be devoted to the portico, or patio, just outside his headquarters. And standing on the patio, at the beginning of the scene, are the religious leaders who've brought Jesus to Pilate for a trial, the outcome of which **they** have no doubt.

Throughout the scene, John does something pretty interesting: He gives us stage directions. He focuses our attention on Pilate as he moves between his headquarters and the patio. Not once. Not twice. Not even three times, but a total of **seven** times. That's right, Pilate wavers back and forth between Jesus and his accusers, like a drunken frat boy trying to find his way back to his dorm room. And that's just the point. Pilate **wavers**. He asks, "What is truth?"

I think he knows the answer. I think he knows what's right. But he also knows what's **easy**, what's politically expedient, and he's torn between the two. Ultimately, he takes the easy road, caving into political pressure. He denies the truth standing right in front of him. So what am I getting at? What's the "so what" here?

Well, as I mentioned earlier this coming Friday is what's known as "Black Friday." Which most folks—retailers especially—mark at the start of the holiday shopping season. I'm guessing that many of us know what it's like to cave in to the pressure of the cultural impulse to "shop 'til you drop."

I mean, do we **really** believe that our lives will be better if we go and fight our way through stores, to find that elusive bargain that's just more "stuff" that people don't really need. Do we really believe that we need to buy that "perfect" gift that our family, friends and co-workers will probably exchange, or forget about in a few months?

Seriously—do we believe that? What's more, aren't most of us, in fact, just a tad sickened by the almost complete commercialization of Christmas? And yet so many participate in it fully, if not joyfully.

Why? Because we're held captive by a false idea, the lie that **things** make us happy, or that the right gift will change the way people feel about us, or will stand as proof of how we feel about someone. We're urged on by an incessant, image-driven marketing, in insatiable consumer-oriented culture.

So—what do we do? We either relentlessly consume more and more, or we feel inadequate because we can't. In fact, I'd be willing to bet that lots of us waver between feelings of compulsion to buy and spend more—whether we can afford to or not—and feelings of guilt, knowing that this is neither healthy nor helpful, for us, those around us, or even our planet.

But must Pilate's fate be ours? It needn't because here's the truth: It's found in the statement, the promise, that Jesus makes to Pilate: "**Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.**" Pilate doesn't listen. But today—we might.

And so, as we gather here on Stewardship Sunday, on Christ the King Sunday; as we gather a few days before Thanksgiving, and a week before Advent; as we prepare to enter the Christmas season, maybe we **should** listen. Maybe we should listen to the voice of our Savior—the voice of truth.

If we do—what will we hear? It's simple—that we're enough! That we're worthy of love and honor and respect. That we don't have to **do** anything, or for that matter **buy** anything, to earn God's love because God's already given us that love freely and abundantly in Jesus. A love so big it encompasses all of creation; a love that tells us that we are enough—and this, brothers and sisters, is truth.

Knowing it—believing it—gives us the freedom to pledge and to give of our time, talent, and treasure, the freedom to celebrate with joy rather than frenzy to buy and to give throughout Christmas, but out of love and gratitude, instead of insecurity or compulsion.

WE ARE ENOUGH.

A simple enough message, yet so important that God sent Jesus to bear that message in his flesh and blood. Simple, profound, compelling. Yet still difficult to hear. Why? Well—and here brothers and sisters is the thing: It's difficult to hear because the cacophony of worldly voices can get pretty darn loud, and is more than capable of drowning out that message, and of seeing to it that the truth of Jesus Christ is just one of many subjective "truths" in people's lives.

So today, when we re-dedicate our lives to Christ our King, who is the way, the truth, and the life, when we re-dedicate ourselves—now and over the next four weeks of Advent, throughout the Christmas season, and into the new year—to hearing and receiving that message, let us also re-dedicate our lives to announcing that message to the world.

Let us rededicate ourselves to being the voice of truth to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

Thanks be to God. Amen and amen.