

“Are You the King?”

1 Sam. 8; John 18:33-37

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After successfully winning a motocross race, the driver, Ricky Bobby, says grace before a meal with family and friends. He begins the prayer: Dear Lord Baby Jesus. (*Talladega Nights*) It surprised the audience around the table as much as it might surprise us. Who prays to baby Jesus?

We put a number of adjectives in front of Jesus' name to describe him.

Ricky Bobby puts Lord Baby in front of Jesus' name. Our Church Tradition which has developed over the past 2000 years would have us use three primary titles to describe Jesus: Prophet, Priest and King. We could add others, like Teacher, which is the primary title for Jesus in the gospel of Mark.

In using these terms, we identify who Jesus is, and what he is about.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. We acknowledge the title of King. Today's sermon is what we might call conceptual in nature. As the occasion of Christ the King Sunday gives us an opportunity to explore what it means to call Jesus, "King."

How was that decided? And what does that mean? According to Wikipedia, In 1925, Pope Pius XI instituted "The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe," for the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church, which was to mark the end of "Ordinary Time" before the season of Advent. Those who follow the Revised Common Lectionary, which include the Lutheran, Anglican, Moravian, Methodist, Nazarene, Reformed and United Protestant churches, adopted this practice. And so we also celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. So isn't it appropriate to be sharing in a Feast after the worship service!

And, it's important especially for us in this country to explore what it might mean for us to consider Jesus a king, because, really, the notion of having a king as ruler in our lives is a foreign unfamiliar concept. In the US, we don't have kings or queens. Wait, we do have Burger King. Does that count?

We have a lot of people, in government and in society who would like to be royals, kings and queens--but, so far, we remain a representative democracy.

In the 18th century revolutionary war the founders and fighters of this country rejected the King and his empire who was trying to rule over them. To which the King at the time, King George, is quoted as saying, and I believe this is accurate: "You Say, the price of my love is a price you're unwilling to pay." (*Hamilton*, Is that what he said?)

To get an idea of what kings and queens might be all about, what are some other popular portrayals of royals? Of Kings and Queens and Monarchs?

Game of Thrones? Elsa from Frozen? Black Panther from Wakanda?

The reality is that it all falls short from helping us get a sense of what monarchical rule is all about. The long passage from 1 Samuel 8 gives a decent notion of what having kings would be like: It describes a king who takes what he wants without objection, and demands unwavering loyalty no matter the request.

That passage is a fascinating pivot in the history of the Israelites. The system of government in the days of Samuel to that point had been decisions of judges. The Israelites had to that point rejected the having a king as ruler as a theological statement. The Lord God was to be their king, and The Lord God alone.

But, the people wanted to be like other nations and have a king--"everyone else is doing it!"

Samuel warns the people: "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day".

The notion of having a king, theologically, was already problematic for those who were to worship the Lord God. This is the tradition that Jesus was part of, and which has been handed down to us.

Add to this, the problem of having a king rule over you who is not of your own nation or people. A foreign king who makes decisions on your behalf.

As I mentioned last week, the Israelites had been subject to a number of different occupiers, and the kings of those occupiers. Syrians, Persians, Babylonians, etc,

all these occupied Israel at different times, and the Israelites were subjected to their kings. In Jesus' time, the Romans were the occupying force, Caesar was on the throne. And Pontius Pilate was his emissary, Pilate was charged to speak for and make decisions on behalf of the Roman King, and his primary task was to maintain the *Pax Romana*--keep the peace by any means necessary,

Which is why this encounter between Jesus and Pilate here in John's gospel is so loaded.

We find Jesus, who previously in John had rejected any would be attempt to make him King, which is what the people wanted to do way back in Chapter 6, again, here in John 18 charged with the offense of being a king. This is a title people wanted to give to him, but he's not too sure he wants it.

We hear a conversation between Pilate and Jesus—seemingly two emissaries of two kingdoms. A contest between two kingdoms, punctuated by questions. Pilate, asking Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus, responds with the question, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” A way of asking, where does your power come from? Where does authenticity, where does authority come from? Jesus is saying, “Were you sent, or are you curious?” Pilate responds, “I am not a Jew; I am not a Judean. Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me!” So, I've got to know, “Are you the King?” and, just “What have you done?”

Pilate was a shrewd politician and a keen observer of context. He wanted to know more about this Jesus of Nazareth--who he was and what he'd done that put him into an irreconcilable situation with the ruling elite. [[The Rev. Mark Andrew Jefferson, Ph.D.: Day1.org](#)]

Any would be “king of the jews” would be a direct challenge to Pilate's authority, a potential threat, and would need to be dealt with by imprisonment or by being put to death. But, before doing so, Pilate had to weigh which would be less problematic. Releasing Jesus, putting him in prison, or Crucifying him? Any choice would cause a stir, one may cause a rebellion.

Pilate needs to know, Are you the king?

Eventually we get an admission, a confession, from the one on trial; a revealing about just who this person named Jesus really is and how he sees himself.

“My kingdom is not of this world.”

Are you the king?

I am, but I am not king in the way you, or any others would likely think.

I am king in that I have authority; I have subjects, I have power. But I rule in a way much different from the way you and other worldly kings do.

The Rev. Mark Andrew Jefferson parses this out by saying, “Jesus is an invasion on the carefully crafted status quo, and is a divine bulwark against systems that thrive off the normalcy of oppression and degradation. Jesus is a king who has waged war through peace on empire.” He does this, by not exploiting or extracting from the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, the marginalized, the foreigner, but instead by being in solidarity with them. By identifying with them. “This type of policy program has placed Jesus in the crosshairs of the powers of a different kind of Kingdom, a different notion of power.”

Are you the king?

Jesus in a round about way, as he faces coronation by wearing a crown of thorns, says, “yes” I am king. But my rule is different from yours. Into an empire that says that power comes through wealth, status, fame, or that crimes are okay so long as you can get away with them, Jesus, a different kind of king, whose kingdom is not of this world, seeks after the lowly, the least, the last, the lost, and the left behind.

Are you the King?

Jesus, says yes, but my kingdom is not of this world, my followers feed the hungry, teach the masses, cloth the naked, visit those who are in prison, welcome the stranger. Hope is given to the hopeless, meaning and purpose are given to a motley crew of disciples.

Are you the king?

Yes, My kingdom isn't of this world, it is not confined to one particular people. It is not bound by language or culture or geography. It stretches beyond time and space.

Are you the king?

That question, Pilate asked 2000 years ago, of Jesus is one we are invited to answer for ourselves.

Is Jesus our king?

And if so, do we pledge allegiance to him and no other ruler, not money or any would be king or dictator who would demand our absolute loyalty.

Is Jesus our king? And if so, do we do what he commands by loving our neighbor, and forgiving 70 times 7 times.

On this Sunday we are invited to consider Jesus with a particular adjective before his name. Not baby, not prophet. Not priest, not Teacher. Those are all important, but on this Sunday we are invited to consider the title “King” to describe Jesus.

Is Jesus our king? And if so--and here is the *good news*--then we belong. And how nice it is to belong. To be part. To join with others in God’s vision for our world: the kingdom of God. Our faith tells us, “God has come into the world in the person of Jesus, the King, and he has shaken the foundations of empire. We are to become children of God,” just as we are, “and continue in the way that Jesus commands us to go,” so that we might truly be a free people who dwell in the kingdom of God. (quotes from Rev. Jefferson).

Thanks be to God. Amen