



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road
roswell, georgia 30076

26-Nov-2006 Christ The King Sunday

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 1:4-8 John 18:33-37

SERMON: No Kosmos King (Rev. Susan Haynes)

What sort of a king has “fingernails dark with tearing fish into a thousand morsels, feet trod filthy, oiled with tears, then caked again?” This is “the king” that stood before Pilate. Surely Pilate was annoyed with the Pharisees who had brought Jesus to him. The Pharisees had already found Jesus worthy of being put to death as a blasphemer. But under Roman rule, they did not have the authority to put Jesus to death, so they’ve brought him to Pilate.

Pilate has only one legitimate concern: whether this man standing before him poses a threat to Rome. This humbly dressed man, whose hands are tied behind his back and whose followers are no where to be found. It is not too far a stretch to imagine the disdain, perhaps mixed in with some incredulity, as we hear Pilate ask Jesus: “*Are you the king of the Jews?*”

This scene of Jesus before Pilate may seem strangely out of place just before Advent. On the calendar of the Christian year, today is designated “Christ the King Sunday.” This is the last Sunday of the church year; the New Year’s Eve, so to speak, of the church calendar, the Sunday before the entire cycle begins again with the First Sunday of Advent.

Over this year we have gone through the major events in the life of Jesus and today is the day we should sound a soaring “amen” and proclaim Christ as the sovereign of all history, and yes, even of our own lives. But perhaps we are more like Pilate, disdainful and incredulous, of a person who touched lepers; the epitome of refuse in his time. A person who sat on hillsides in the midst of dusty children clamoring for his attention. A person who was born into the midst of manure and a the sounds of cows mooing and sheep bleating; A person who washed the feet of his grimy disciples...a person who dared enter someone’s personal space by covering the person’s eyes with mud he had made with his own spit.

This is the person who stood before Pilate, a person Pilate thought to be utterly powerless. The reality is that Pilate, who represents the world’s understanding of power, in fact is the one who has little power. And the power Pilate does have, to put Jesus to death, will be overturned *just a few short days later*.

This person who stood before Pilate represented a kingdom Pilate could not understand. Jesus’ model of kingship is not Arthur and the Round Table or George in the White House or Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace. Rather, Jesus’ seeks out the lost and the sick and the sinner. Jesus does not dine on silver and porcelain, but in the homes of those considered “unworthy.”

As he tries to explain to Pilate, Jesus does not call up an army to fight the power of Rome with swords, but gives up his life for the truth, serving Love rather than the shifting political powers and principalities of this world. Jesus is not on high, but down in the muck with us, walking beside us and giving us strength to continue walking ourselves. Jesus gets his hands dirty. And if we are so foolish as to follow this king that the world looks at with incredulity and disdain, *then we must also get our hands dirty*.

Incredibly, this king does have loyal subjects. Loyal subjects such as the members of one church who nightly meet the dancers as they leave the strip club where they are employed. These church members walk the dancers to their cars to insure they are not harassed by the strip club’s clientele.

Loyal subjects such as Andy Grove, one of the richest people in the world. He has plenty of accomplishments to the point of view of Pilate's world. Andy could sit back and relax. Instead, he is trying to solve the problem of uninsured people, some of whom are jamming emergency rooms and the rest of whom are getting no medical care.

Loyal subjects such as the accountant for a large professional firm. The accountant went to a center for ethics and values in the workplace with questions about the integrity of his work. Not whether he was doing it correctly, legally, and well, but whether or not it fit his values and beliefs. At that center he was encouraged to think of his job in terms of stewardship of the firm's finances and the difference he could make in people's lives by ensuring that the company was aware of its financial position as it related to keeping the money flowing for payroll and benefits.

Loyal subjects such as those, like us, who are gathered today for worship. At other times and in other places we are what the world names us. We are little league fathers and soccer moms, we are accountants and officers of the military, we are Kmart shoppers and "Solid as a Rock" in our Chevy truck. But when we come to worship, we acknowledge, acclaim, and celebrate a sovereignty and power seldom spoken of during other hours of the week.

All of us who claim the name Christian should be as unrecognizable as members of a king's court as Jesus was unrecognizable as a king. Our king is one who did not count privilege and power as things which set him apart; *neither should we*. Our king got down in the dirt with those who were dirty; *so should we*. Our king spoke out for truth and love and did not retreat to the safety of his position and protectors; *we should do likewise*.

Last Sunday, Jim talked about the Presbyterian Priesthood. If you weren't here, I encourage you to go to our church website and read Jim's sermon. As Presbyterians, we believe that all Christians are called by God, not just those of us who have particular training and skills to be in professional ministry.

I recently read the following from a sermon by a fellow Presbyterian minister, Patrick Willson of Williamsburg, Virginia. I believe it summarizes what Jim was saying last Sunday about our Presbyterian Priesthood and what I have tried to say this week.

As a kingdom of priests, we are a colony of the Kingdom, living the curious customs of a faraway but foreseen homeland. We take bread, bless, break, and share it because we have learned a source for being fed that the world cannot imagine. With a handful of water we name ourselves with the secret name of the children of God, and we hear our names called as we read ancient words that speak with the unmistakable voice of the Living Christ. We pray for those who care not a whit about all this, who think prayer absurd, and who even despise us because praying for them composes our priesthood and exhibits the gracious customs of Christ's kingdom. We speak words of blessing, and take that blessing with us to keep our poise and balance in a world eloquent with curses. Many churches nowadays sponsor worship services designed to be, as much as possible, like our surrounding culture. Too often, nothing could be further from John vision in the Revelation. Bring on the throne shaking with thunder and lightning, usher in marvelous creatures with seven eyes and seven crowns and six wings. Around this throne nothing can be too fabulous. Here we look for another kingdom, however improbable that will inevitably sound to Pilate and People magazine. Here we celebrate sovereignty. We see, however dimly, and we enact, however imperfectly, another kingdom where gentleness and blessing are as common as violence and curse are in the kingdoms of this world. We take our cues from another Lord, the One who was, and is, and is to come; to Christ be glory in the church - *and finally, in the world that belongs to Christ! Amen.*

Revelation 1:4-8

4John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. 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.

John 18:33-37

33Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." 37Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "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."

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