On Christ the King Sunday we come to the final Sunday of the church year. This is not simply the end of the church year; it is a culmination of a story. It is a time for us to reflect on God’s Kingdom as Jesus has been teaching us, and how that fits in to our life story. It is a time to recognize Jesus as the one that sits with the Most High, as the one who is the true ruler of our hearts and minds and lives.

Pope Pius XI first instituted the feast day of Christ the King in 1925 as a response to the rising power of dictatorships and fascism in Europe. It was meant as a reminder that there is no true ruler but God in Christ. Pius XI hoped to combat the growing influence of absolute dictators in the secular world.

And, here we are in Pilate’s chamber with Jesus where he is to be tried as a criminal and sentenced to death. The courtroom scene in the passage from John we are given to consider takes place after Pilate has a conversation with the Jewish authorities. They have asked Pilate to judge Jesus guilty and put him to death. Please understand, these Jews that John shows us are not the Jewish men and women that have been following Jesus. They are not the Jewish peasants of the Roman Empire. These are powerful men that have feared Jesus’ popularity and his message that jeopardizes their lives of relative safety under Roman rule. They paint Jesus as a dangerously subversive character that will incite the crowds that follow him to rise up against the powers that be, the leader of a heard, an angry mob, that will storm the gates of the Empire.

So, Pilate goes into his chamber curious about this man Jesus who has shaken things up. The interchanges between Pilate and Jesus are not what Pilate expects them to be. Instead of having the upper hand, of being the one that does the intimidating, Pilate finds himself faced with a man that will not play his game. Really what Pilate wants to know from Jesus is - Who are you? Why are you such a threat to the leaders of your people? And, are you a threat to me? Jesus is calm and very deliberate in his replies.

Allow me to paraphrase and add in a bit of interpretation.

P- Are you the King of the Jews?

J -Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?

P –I’m not not from your people. How would I have heard? It is your own authorities that have handed you over to me. What have you done?

J -My kingdom is not from this world. This kingdom is not like anything you have ever seen before.

P – So, you are a king?

J- You say I am a king. I was born to tell out the truth. My people are those who hear and listen to God’s truth.

Jesus is the one that comes across in this exchange as the person with authority. Pilate may wear the robes of royalty, but Jesus possess a manner of royalty that troubles Pilate. His message subverts the traditional understanding of kingship. In fact, in this scenario, Jesus is being *accused* of being a king. Think about that for a minute, a KING, a title that should be describing power that is transformative and that promotes just mercy; a title that has been corrupted instead to describe a hierarchy of privilege and abuse.

He does not claim to be a ruler, one that oppresses and takes and takes and takes until there is nothing left of value. The truth that Jesus speaks is not a truth that comes from an intellectual exercise or philosophical exchange. It is truth that is a verb, something we DO, in exactly in the same way that we are called to DO love. And indeed, from John 3:16, (God so loved the world…) we know that Jesus is here to witness to the truth. It is the truth is that God is love.

And though we may think today of Christ sitting high above us, at the right hand of God, the reality of God in Christ is that we have a God that meets us and deeply desires our relationship. We have, as writer Rachel Held Evans describes, a *God that stoops*. Don’t you just love that image; God meeting us where we are, face-to-face. A while ago I remember Jamie telling a story in a sermon of one of her teachers, a nun, coming down on her level to meet her eyes. I don’t really remember much else about that story except that extra ordinally sense of intimate connection when we are being seen, really seen.

Over and over again God stoops down to meet us. Evans writes, *“From walking with Adam and Eve through the garden of Eden, to traveling with the liberated Hebrew slaves in a pillar of cloud and fire, to slipping into flesh and eating, laughing, suffering, healing, weeping, and dying among us as part of humanity, the God of Scripture stoops and stoops and stoops and stoops and stoops. At the heart of the Gospel message is a God who stoops to the point of death on a cross. Dignified or not, believable or not, ours is a God perpetually on bended knee, doing everything it takes to convince stubborn and petulant children that they are seen and loved.”*

Our God is a Beatitude king, a servant king, the one who washes the feet of those he loves, stooping down to truly know our human lives, to reassure, to comfort, to challenge, to urge, to support, to stir-up, to trouble our waters and bring us to truth. God’s love for us is so great that God chose to walk among us, defeated death, and set free God’s resurrecting Spirit upon the earth.

We heard from the Book of Revelation this morning that God is the one that is, and who was and who is to come. God is, was and is to come. *God is our present, here and now and in all time*. St. John the Divine was writing to the seven city councils of the day, urging them, encouraging them toward a new social order, replacing the oppressive structures established by the Roman Empire. And, Jesus, ruler of our hearts, with the Creator from the beginning, has made us to be a kingdom of priests, acting as agents, bringing reconciliation to this world. I know, it all sounds so high and lofty, and that can make it seem too otherworldly, out of our grasp. But God, our loving, challenging, stooping God, is never far from our hearts, and we are told that Christ loves – present tense – loves us and that he frees us. Jesus liberates us and calls us to act like we are free….. free and willing to respond spontaneously to truth…… free to the possibilities of new birth and life in him.

This is Christ, the King of our hearts, urging us on. Christ is a king worthy of our devotion and praise. And what is brought into the world can only happen through God’s Spirit manifesting truth and love in us. Even as we look ahead to Advent and toward the birth of the baby Jesus, we can’t turn away from the cross that we are so close to in John’s gospel today. LOVE is a risk. Living TRUTH is a risk. It’s hard, and it calls for sacrifice. And, it is the hope of resurrected life. The risen Christ, who is, and was, and is to come, is our witness, guide and companion as he births his kin-dom here and now among us.

I’d like to share this poem from Mennonite pastor the Rev. Joanna Harader.

God,

I know that Pilate is not a person to emulate,

But I find myself wishing that I, too, could interrogate you.

My question is his question:

What is the truth?

I think I know, but others think otherwise,

And there’s a lot of anger and confusion and yelling going on right now.

So if you could proclaim the truth

In no uncertain terms

It might help us out.

I also wonder, along with Pilate,

If you are, in fact, the King.

Because there are some situations down here that a royal decree from heaven could maybe fix.

My list of questions is long,

And I suppose we don’t have time for them all even if you were inclined to answer.

Still, if you must be silent, God,

Please also be gentle.

Receive my questions in love, and transform my curiosity into commitment—

A commitment to follow your way of peace even when I don’t understand;

A commitment to trust in you

Even when your power is not evident.

Holy One, be—today and always—

My way, my life, my truth. Amen.