

## WHAT KIND OF KING IS THIS?

John 18:33-37

Pilate & Jesus

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Lent 6B

Two people experience the same thing, and come to opposite conclusions. There's a dinner among friends, adults and children all around the table. Someone brings out a tray with crackers and dip. The dip is something made with walnuts, olives, and parsley. One of the children reacts like the mere presence of that food on the table is physically painful to bear. "Get it away from me, it'll make me sick!" "How can you hate it if you haven't even tried it? Someone asks. But there is no reasoning with this child. Two people experience the same thing, and come to opposite conclusions. How can one food item lead to delight in one, and disgust in another? We all like food, but in our preferences we are 180 degrees apart.

The basketball game is on the TV, friends all gathered to watch, but when Connecticut scores only half the room cheers, the other half is silent. And when Michigan scores the quiet ones erupt in joy and the Connecticut fans are forced into silence.

There's music on the radio, and when one song comes on I turn up the volume because I like this song, but one of the kids in the back seat shrieks, "Yuck, turn it off it, that music's terrible, it's ruing my ears!" Two people experience the same thing and come to opposite conclusions.

Jesus and Pontius Pilate are facing each other across a room, they're talking about the same thing, but they reach opposite conclusions. They're talking about the same thing, not about food, not about sports, not about music, but about something called a kingdom. Both of them know something about kingdoms, both of them think that a kingdom is a very important thing, but they disagree on what a kingdom should be.

I love this about Jesus, he says something simple, and he says it with power. He says something that gets Pilate's attention, something unexpected, something that sends chills up and down my spine even today. Listen to what Jesus says to Pontius Pilate: "***My kingdom does not belong to this world***". This is an amazing thing for Jesus to say to Pilate. He's been arrested and threatened with death. Jesus should be cowering and begging for mercy. But he looks Pilate in the eye and says "***My kingdom does not belong to this world.***"

Now Pilate knows a thing or two about kingdoms, in fact he serves one of the greatest kings the world has ever known, Caesar, the powerful Emperor in Rome, who has conquered every single land and people between Britain and Babylon, Pilate knows all about kingdoms and he looks at the bloody bruises and wounds on Jesus' body and laughs! "***You're no king, just***

***look at you! Where are your soldiers, where are your weapons? You have no kingdom ... and you're about to die.***"

In the Book of Revelation Jesus is proclaimed as "*the ruler of kings on earth*". Many Christians celebrate the Lordship of Christ by imagining him as a King with a crown, sitting on a mighty throne in heaven, watching our every move, making judgments, and helping us in times of trouble.

All this talk of kings and crowns and thrones and kingdoms confuses my attempt to know, love and worship Jesus Christ. There aren't too many kings and queens left these days. The idea that someone can rule over a country simply because they were born into a royal family offends me, and I'm even more offended when kings and queens live in privilege and wealth while the masses live in poverty. I'm glad to be a citizen of an independent nation that rebelled against having a king long ago.

But the language of kings and kingdoms was one of the ways that the first Christians tried to explain the true power of Jesus Christ. Naming Jesus as the mightiest of the kings on earth was their way of telling us that Jesus Christ is a power to be reckoned with. To describe Jesus Christ as the "ruler of the kings on earth" is a remarkable claim that the same Jesus who offers each of us the personal gift of grace and peace will not desist until the whole world knows these gifts, even if the mightiest, most powerful rulers and kings of the earth are doing everything to stop his progress. There aren't too many kings left these days, But the point remains clear: There are no powers or principalities that can outshine the light and truth of Christ.

To a non-Christian, this sounds ridiculous. If Jesus Christ is ruler of kings, why do people still suffer at the hands of modern day rulers, who fight wars, who refuse to feed their hungry, who torture and kill their opponents, whose only language is power over others, and who will do anything to hold onto their power? Why is there suffering and pain if Jesus Christ is Lord of the earth, ruler of kings? Is he powerless, is he weak, is he hiding, has he forgotten us? Scripture declares that Jesus is ruler of the kings of earth. The power, majesty and corruption of earthly kings are terribly real, yet the witness of the Bible concludes that Jesus is Lord over all, worthy of our strong commitment.

From first to last, the story of Jesus is a story of conflict about the true meaning of kingship. King Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus because of a rumor that a new King of the Jews had been born in Bethlehem. And now, here is Pontius Pilate, representing the Caesar, the mightiest ruler in the world, with his armies, weapons, raw power close at hand. And here is Jesus, arrested and beaten, representing another kingdom. "*Are you a king?*", Pilate asks, but he only sees weakness in Jesus.

But Jesus gives his answer: *“My kingdom does not belong to this world”*, and this means that Jesus does not copy the ways of the kingdoms that Pilate had in mind. Jesus’ kingdom does not belong to this world, but it is very definitely at work in this world. His kingdom has no soldiers or weapons, but it has power that Pontius Pilate never understood. His kingdom has no soldiers or weapons, but it does have you.

As Jesus stood up for this kind of kingdom, he is only hours away from death on the cross. When the death sentence is approved, *“So much for the kingdom that does not belong to this world,”* said Pilate, said the chief priests, said the soldiers and the mob. But none of them reckoned with the power of God and the vision of life that triumphs over death in the kingdom that Jesus described. Jesus Christ ... the ruler of the kings of the earth. Let his claim, rest on you. His kingdom is not of this world, but it is hard at work in the world, it is hard at work in us, hard at work in you.