



**A Sermon for The Last Sunday After Pentecost  
November 24, 2024**



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## **Last Sunday after Pentecost, November 24, 2024 (Christ the King)**

**Preamble:** Come Holy Spirit come, come as the wind that blows, come as the fire that burns, come to guide the meditations of my mind, the feelings of my heart and the words from my lips as I attempt to understand God's holy word and deliver that message for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the last Sunday after Pentecost, or the last Sunday of the Church liturgical year. This Sunday is also recognized as a celebration of Christ the King. How interesting that we bestow this title of king, when Jesus himself made a point of not directly accepting it. When questioned by Pilate, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus responds with a question of his own, asking Pilate for the motivation of his inquiry. The exact wording differs between Gospels and texts but essentially Jesus asks Pilate if he is asking for himself or because of what others have told him. One might mistake this as audacity or hubris, especially given the circumstances that put Jesus in audience with Pilate. I see this intentional re-direction as providing a means for Pilate to save face. In further dialog, as reported in today's gospel, Pilate presses the question "So you are a king?". To which Jesus responds with a rhetorical deflection, "You say that I am a king...". We must ask ourselves why would Jesus not accept this title?

Collectively, we have a fascination with Kings and Queens and royalty in general. Coronations get worldwide media coverage, complete with run-up commentary and full-on display of the pomp and circumstance involved with these events. Perhaps the charm stems from stories we heard or read as children. Disney kings and princes are portrayed as powerful, wise, and benevolent or simply as charming. The occasional bad kings in our stories face redemption or justice. In his novel "Lord of The Rings" JRR Tolkien portrayed the nine kings of men as wraiths, corrupted by power, and ultimately

destroyed when good triumphs over evil. Perhaps our interest in kings is a holdover from a cultural linkage to England, or some other monarchy past or present; or it may come from the numerous references to kings in the bible. While preparing for this sermon I checked the Concordance, that's a big book listing where every word in the bible is found, and it showed the word king is used on more than 2,400 occasions. This tells me the human preoccupation with kings is not new.

Monarchy, in its purest form, represents ultimate power over the people. Pilate knew this and so did the chief priests that handed Jesus over to their Roman rulers. Although their fears were similar, they were likely not identical because of how monarchy is achieved. Ascendency to kingship derives from two different primary sources, violence or hereditary bloodline. Pilate was likely concerned about the former and how that would affect his Roman prefect. The priests were apparently worried about the latter, with Jesus being a descendant of David. Either way, they both would have tried to protect against losing their power and control over the people. My takeaway from the Gospel is that Pilate perceived Jesus to be somewhat less of a threat than the priests.

Jesus too would have understood these constructs of ascendency, which would have given him ample reason to avoid accepting the title of king. Jesus' message was not one of violence but of peace. "Love your enemy" might be a way to win hearts and minds but it's not very dangerous to a Roman Legion. As for the heredity aspect, Jesus knew himself to be the son of God. And since the Lord God is established as the Alpha and the Omega, who is, was, and is to come, and therefore still seated on the throne, logic would tell us that, at best, Jesus could claim to be a prince but not a king. Jesus tried to explain this to Pilate when he states, "My kingdom is not from this world". Isaiah 9:6 provides us a foreshadowing reference to Christ the prince, "For a child will be

born to us...and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace". In this role, Jesus provides us a means to reconcile to God.

So, if Jesus refused the title and honor of Kingship, why do we consider Christ the king? Even though he was not a king in the earthly sense, he rules with the Father and the Holy Spirit, separate but inseparable. Further in Revelation, specifically 19:16, Jesus is depicted as a king in the second coming. He is referenced as the "King of kings and Lord of lords". Some suggest this is to demonstrate his ultimate authority over all earthly kings and rulers. We know that his kingdom is not of this world, and we believe the God of Israel has made an everlasting covenant, secured by the blood of Christ, that his dominion is everlasting and that we are invited to experience the joy, for "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice".

Amen.