

Calvary United Methodist Church
November 25, 2018

NOT THE KING YOU EXPECTED

Rev. Dr. A. Robert Cook

Children's Message:

John 18:33-37

Can I kind of slip in here with you all? Ok, you did really great. I'm impressed. (They are gummies, right?) They are gummies. (I don't like gummies.) You don't like gummies? What do you prefer? (I prefer Cheez-its and Wheat Thins.) Cheez-it and Wheat Thins. Hershey's Kisses? (Uh-ha) Ok, you like chocolate? (Uh-ha) That's good.

This is a nice group today. I always love seeing you guys. Let me ask you: have you ever seen a real king or queen? You have? (No, I haven't.) Not Burger King. A real...where do kings and queens live? (In a castle!) In a castle? (Sometimes in palaces.) In a palace. And they might have a lot of them. (Or maybe in a house.) Big house, right. What do they wear? (Crowns.) Crowns. (Robes.) Robes, trimmed with fur. (Dresses.) Have you ever seen a picture of the Queen of England, Queen Elizabeth II? (No...Yes...No.) What does she wear all the time? She is famous for it. She does wear a dress, that's true, that's very true. (Crown.) She has a big crown, but if she is out in public, she wears hats. Nobody wears hats as well as Queen Elizabeth II. She has great hats. Just amazing. There is no king in England right now. Her husband is a Prince, but eventually one of her sons or grandsons will be king. (The king of England died, right?) He did, a long, long time ago, probably before your father was even maybe his father yet. (Maybe he had a battle and he got dead.) No, the King of England died in 1952 of natural causes, he was George VI, but that's just an aside.

So, anyway, what do kings and queens do all day? (They rule people.) How do they do that? What does that look like? (They like...) They wave a lot. (They wave a lot and sometimes they like get them something.) You got that down good. I'm impressed, yes, you could do this, right? You could do this. Look at you! Man. You are going to be the prom queen at least, right?

Well, the Queen of England actually does have work to do and she has these things called the boxes. They bring them from Parliament, which is sort of like their Congress and every week she has to go through the boxes and sign official declarations. She has ladies-in-waiting. She has gentlemen valets, all these servants, right? And really cool stuff. That's what kings and queens do. And when they go someplace they go first class. I've seen her yacht. It was tied up in Baltimore some years ago and it was a big boat. (Like some soldiers die.) Well, that does happen in battle, yes.

Now, what would you think about a king who doesn't wear a crown? Or wears blue jeans? (Just a people pretending to be a king.) Maybe he wears a ball cap. (Maybe he's pretending to

be a king.) What if he is a king who doesn't live in a palace or a castle, but he's homeless? (Jesus?) Well, that's the right answer, but hold on. (He must be sad not living in a home.) I think so. (He must be brave...) He is. (I think the king up in Jesus are sad that they don't live in their castles or homes.) He's not sad at all. Actually, do you want to know where Jesus' home is? Where do you think his home is? (Up in heaven and in...) In where? (In here, a temple.) He's in your heart and he is king of your heart and he doesn't need a throne any more than your heart, he just needs your heart. And he doesn't need to wear a crown, actually his symbol isn't a crown, do you know what his symbol is? (A hat.) (Child speaks.) No, that's the Holy Spirit, that's close. (A cross.) A cross, alright! I was thinking this sermon was hijacked, but it's good. (Sometimes crosses are kind of like found in mummies.) Well, he's not a mummy. (This is what a cross looks like.) It is, right. We've got several in the room, yes, and in the window and it's great.

So, he's not like other kings and he doesn't send people to die for him; in fact, he died for us. This is a very different king, and the place he wants to rule most is in your heart, because then you will help your sister, you will make your sister's bed and say, "I just love you so much I'll make your bed with you today, and take the extra portion of ice cream." Would your sister do that for you? Yeah, give you the extra portion of ice cream? Would you do that for your brother? Would you help your brother make his bed? (Maybe.) Maybe. Golden rule is good. Your parents are teaching you well.

When Jesus is king of your heart, the whole world is a better place and you will feel him in your heart every day. And you probably do. So let's pray.

Thank you, Lord, that you are the kind of king that we didn't expect, a very different king, who doesn't rule with armies and powers, but instead rules in our hearts. Thank you for our kids and help us to teach them more about you by the way we live and the way that you rule our hearts. Bless them that you may rule in theirs too. Amen.

I'm sorry I don't have Cheez-its or Wheat Thins. This is what I have, but you can try it. (That's ok. I have some Cheez-its and Wheat Thins and this.) You brought some Cheez-it and Wheat Thins? (And I have some more favorite foods at my house.) Oh, ok.

Message:

I invite you to pray with me as I pray with you and we look into the Word of God together: Gracious Lord, help us to hear from you this day, to understand a little bit more of what it means that you are king of our hearts and one day of all creation, when all creation is fulfilled in your peace. Draw us near to you that we might know you and knowing you find it our mission to make you known. Amen.

Well, as I said, today is the last Sunday of the church year and next year begins next Sunday, begins a new year. It begins with the first Sunday of Advent and it takes us into these stories of

Jesus. The church cycle runs about three years, A, B, and C if you really want to know, but the last Sunday of each church year is dedicated to Christ the King. And this is not in step with the academic calendar, the solar calendar, the fiscal calendars. Instead it is centered upon the life and the teachings of Jesus. Well, he's at the center of everything we are about which is why we call ourselves Christian, Christ followers. And this calendar, the church year, goes back to antiquity, but Christ the King only showed up in 1925 and that was when the Pope at the time Pius XI, he was worried about this troublesome little fellow calling himself Il Duce, the Chief and about a Russian dictator named Stalin and a curious Austrian running around in Germany with that curious solute. And he wanted to cut them down to size and so he did. Il Duce and the others have passed from the scene many many years ago. Jesus remains as King of Kings.

But he is not the kind of king that anyone expected then or even now and over the centuries kings and queens, kings and kingdoms have gone and they are done and Jesus remains. He is worshiped, he is studied, he is venerated, quoted by hundreds of millions of people every day. And the kind of king that he is is what we see in this picture of Jesus before Pilate.

Pilate is an interesting study in himself. This is a bust of what he may have looked like, it is a contemporary representation of Pilate of the time. He is a career military diplomat. He comes from a class of knightly Roman families. He is someone who is an up and comer. He is fairly young, he is in his 30s at this point. He is hoping for a good strong career and a nice retirement, a very wealthy one. And he is a capable governor. He is not popular. He came to Israel around the year 26. He went into the port city of Caesarea in the north and he began to establish his administration but he knew that he had to go down to Jerusalem, some 75 miles south, because that was the real capital of Israel. And so when he went there he set up the standard of Caesar Tiberius in the fortress Antonia which overlooked the temple compound. When he did that, that caused a riot and for five days seven thousand Jewish men rioted in the temple. They actually had a sit down demonstration.

Well, the man is a Roman. He knows what to do. He knows power and force, so he said, "You get up or we will slaughter you." And the men did the most curious thing...they peeled back their tunic, they bared their necks and said, "Go ahead. You may kill us rather than us insult the Lord God."

Now, that was unexpected. He didn't understand that kind of power, the power of commitment. He understood brute force. He understood the power of the law. He understood death, but he didn't understand this at all. And so, they backed off, the people left, they moved the standard and Pilate lost a little bit of prestige right there. And he always looked for ways to reestablish his power.

So fast forward three years later. Temple authorities have roused him from his bed and they present before him this bloodied, ragged figure of a Galilean Rabbi. He had been arrested the night before, he had suffered a brutal and savage beating and the temple authorities called upon Pilate to charge this man with insurrection and to execute him. They said he claimed to be a

king, they have no king but Caesar, they said. Pilate had no choice to hear him out. He was not happy about this. He was difficult for him to sort out the details. People were shouting back and forth, so because they were in a volatile state, he sent the temple authorities out of the room. And he brings Jesus in just one on one. And he looks at him and he says, "You are the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said, "Are you saying that or what people have told her about me?" And he says, "Do I look like one of your people? Your people turned you in. They want you to die. What did you do?" And there is a silence of Jesus. Then he says, "My kingdom is not of this world. It doesn't look like kingdoms you know," he said. "If it did, my followers would fight so I would not be before you. I am not that kind of king and I am not the world's kind of king."

Now Pilate is annoyed with him: "So, are you a king or what?" And that's when Jesus, I think, he looked past Pilate's eyes, deep into the man's soul. He was seeing in the way that Pilate had never expected to be seen. He says, "You tell me that I am a king. I was born and entered the world so that I could witness to the truth. Everyone who cares for the truth, who has any feeling for the truth recognizes my voice." Disgusted and cynical Pilate spits out: "What is truth? You can't hold it in your hand. I want what you can hold in your hand."

But Pilate finally wanted nothing to do with this thing. He turned him back to the authorities. He let them have their wish. He washed his hands of this whole mess. It wasn't the first Jew Pilate had crucified, it wouldn't be the last, but this one, this ragged, bloody rabbi, he was so different from everyone else.

Now, Pilate did, as I said, understand power, the kind of power that is invested in force and coercion that uses the power of death to put in fear and obedience. As governor he is invested with all the authority of Caesar to carry out Caesar's desire on this conquered people, which essentially very simple: get as much of their wealth as you can and send it to Rome. Make them behave or else. He was not afraid to use that kind of power. Pilate had never encountered the kind of power and authority that he saw in Jesus, this other worldly power clothed in a truth he'd never encountered before.

The world is still trying to figure this out. And the truth of God would be seen in Jesus' life and his death and his resurrection, the self-revealing of God's faithfulness to all humanity that his judgement is one of love. His saving grace has seen this ragged rabbi of Galilee that in Jesus the light of God comes into the world to expose the darkness. And it exposes all the delusions of power which comes and goes and doesn't last. Kings and kingdoms will all pass away and yet in Jesus the fearsome power of human evil, power, authority and justice, even death, are confronted. Though Caesar ruled by force in justice and death, the power and authority of God vested in Jesus brings a kingdom of peace, of mercy, of grace and forgiveness.

And, it is a kingdom of the heart. But one day, and we live by this truth, it will be a kingdom that covers all creation and will heal all creation, which is why Jesus truly is king.

Now, what became of Pilate? Have you ever wondered about Pilate? There are a lot of legends. The Latin legend is that he fell into disgrace and was troubled by what he did because, you see, in Matthew's Gospel, his wife, Claudia Procla, she came to him and said, "Don't harm this man. I've had dreams and visions of him." And so, he disregarded her and that's the Latin version.

That's not the only version, however. There's a version from the earliest branch of the church, the Coptic Church. In North Africa you'll find the Coptic Church, in Palestine, in Ethiopia, other parts of North Africa, even into Iraq and many places. The Coptic Church does have one of the earliest traditions and their tradition about Pilate is this: After Tiberius died, Caligula became Caesar. Tiberius was a wretch of a man, as perverted as they come and Caligula was worse. If you fell into disfavor, your days were numbered and so Pilate fell into emperor disfavor. He and his wife, Claudia, went into exile. And in the Coptic tradition he is deeply troubled by his decision to let Jesus be crucified. His life and his career lay in ruins, his wife never gave up on him and the tradition of the Coptic Church is that she became a follower of Jesus. And at his lowest point, Pilate became a follower of Jesus. Now, isn't that an amazing tradition, so different from what we hear in the Latin version. Can you imagine that the man who blythefully sent Jesus to the cross actually became his disciple? And in the Coptic tradition both he and his wife became martyrs, that he too was crucified for the cause of Christ. And so they canonized he and his wife as St. Pilate and St. Procla. Now, I don't know if that is true, but it certainly sounds to me like a Jesus moment, very much like a Jesus moment. You see the love and the mercy and the justice of Christ liberate us from the endless cycle of sin and death and human power. They give us the grace so that we act with love and justice and mercy ourselves. And the king of love resides in our hearts and that is his kingdom where he reigns as king. And that is the kind of way that he works in this world through people like you and me who bear this message and make it our mission to live as his followers. And that that kingdom will come in its fullness someday but it is not yet. We live between the now and the not yet. But ultimately it will come and all creation will be healed.

We still want to spend a lot of time on power and on the kinds of worldly things that we want. We want strong leaders. We want those invincible military diplomatic kind of geniuses to lead us to prosperity and peace. I'm not sure how that's working out and it's been working out like that for thousands of years. We grant them power, we find that many tend to misuse them. The late Charles Coulson said this: "All the kings and queens I have known in history sent their people out to die for them. I only know one king who decided to die for his people." Jesus is that king. He asks us to follow, not promising us power, prestige even a great life, an easy life. Instead he asks us to take up our cross. That's our symbol of power. That's our symbol of opposition to a world that hates and denigrates and is all about injustice and prejudice and all those isms that we know too well. It's the kind of stuff that fires up people to go out into crowds and start shooting for no good reason because they are so confused inside with the hate and the craziness in their soul. And Jesus is the one who sorts that out for us. And so the cross, not the crown is our symbol of power. And because the work of Jesus is not yet complete, because the world is still convulsing with greed and violence and hatred and war and isms and

death, Jesus calls you and me to make it our mission to take up the cross and to live by the power of love. It isn't that we have all truth; it's that we live in the truth and as we live in the truth, then the truth becomes seen and evident in the world. It is when the light comes in and exposes the darkness: that is how Jesus reigns.

Now, if the Coptic story of what became of St. Pilate is to be believed, it is really a testament, isn't it, to the love of Jesus and the power of Jesus and the power of Jesus invested in the love of God in us remains strong. It remains strong enough still to change the world. Amen.