

Message for Christ the King Sunday

November 21, 2021

John 18:33-37

“Who’s the Boss?” Some of you may recognize this as the name of a TV show that first aired thirty-some years ago. It was very popular at the time and can still be seen on reruns today. For those of you who don’t remember it or perhaps never watched it, this comedy starred Tony Danza and Judith Light. Danza played the role of a macho Italian-American baseball player whose career was cut short by an injury. Light played the role of a very successful but very uptight advertising executive. They were both single parents and, by a strange set of circumstances, Danza became Light’s housekeeper. The comedy centred around their relationship and the perpetual question as to who was the boss. Was the boss the employer or the employee? Was the boss the man or the woman? To further complicate things, there were obvious romantic undercurrents between the two principal characters as well. In the end it was left up to the viewers to decide which, if either of the two, truly was the boss.

Who is the boss? What makes a person the boss? While perhaps not obvious at first, these are questions that we are supposed to be thinking about today, today being Christ the King Sunday. Christmas of course is now right around the corner but before we get so caught up in it all, we pause today and ask ourselves, who’s the boss of our lives? Is it Jesus? If it is Jesus, then what does that mean for us and our lives?

This morning’s scripture passage is one of the suggested lectionary lessons for today, but I must admit that I find it a little bit jarring. Since today’s passage recounts a part of what happened on that first Good Friday, it seems to belong back in the spring around Easter time and not now as we prepare to kick off the Christmas season. And yet, focusing as it does on Jesus’ claim to be a king, it is easy to see why it is one of today’s suggested lessons. Before we can really appreciate what happened on that spring morning so long ago, we have to first know some things about Pontius Pilate himself.

Pilate was the official in charge of Judea. He had a challenging job in a very difficult part of the empire, trying to keep the peace and govern the Jewish people. There was for example a group of people called the Zealots who we

today would call either terrorists or freedom fighters depending upon our perspective. The Zealots waged a war of terror on the Romans, assassinating both soldiers and government officials in an effort to drive them out. Pilate himself wasn't afraid to resort to violence either; on more than one occasion he ordered his soldiers to put down demonstrations and riots with brutal force and a great loss of life. Despite this though Pilate was in many ways a typical bureaucrat; he didn't want trouble and would do his best to try and avoid making hard and difficult decisions. This is what Pontius Pilate was like when early one spring morning he was told that a delegation from the Temple wanted to see him.

The delegation had a prisoner with them who they claimed called himself the Son of God. According to their religious laws their prisoner should be executed for making such a claim but only the Romans could carry out a death sentence. Accordingly, they wanted Pilate to rubber stamp their decision to put the man to death. To his credit though Pilate was unwilling to condemn Jesus without first giving him a hearing.

The gospels tell us that Pilate quickly realized that Jesus hadn't done anything to warrant the death penalty and so he did everything he could to save him. In an effort to arouse sympathy for Jesus, Pilate had him whipped but that didn't work. Pilate then offered to set Jesus free as a goodwill gesture for the Passover celebration but that didn't work either when the mob insisted that they wanted Barabbus freed instead. In the end Pilate gave in and took the easy way out and quite literally washed his hands of the whole matter. Even though he knew that it was wrong, he gave the orders for Jesus to be crucified.

Now it is easy enough perhaps to condemn Pilate for what he did and to say that he should have been stronger and had the courage of his convictions. And yet, in all honesty, would we have done any better if we had been confronted by the Temple authorities and the mob? Indeed, *are* we any better? That question was once posed by Raymond Brown who was one of the greatest biblical scholars of the 20th century.

Brown said that we should hesitate before we condemn Pilate for his behaviour because in the end, we have far more in common with him than anyone else involved on that first Good Friday. This is to say that even now, figuratively speaking, Jesus stands before us just as he did before Pilate awaiting our verdict. Jesus claims to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and *the*

King. In short Jesus claims to be not only *the* boss but even *our* boss, but what is our response to this claim? What is our verdict?

Well, said Brown, the good news is that we aren't like the temple authorities and members of the mob. Unlike them we do not hate Jesus, and that is the good news. The not so good news however is that we aren't like the original disciples either. To be sure they all got scared and ran away on that first Good Friday morning, but we should never forget that they were also the ones who gave up everything to follow Jesus in the first place. They were also the ones who became the foundation upon which the church was built, sacrificing so much including, in some cases, their very lives. Are we anything like them? Are we prepared to be like them? If we are honest then the answer for most of us is no, we are not. Our commitment and discipleship has its limits and only goes so far. The good news then, said Brown, is that we aren't like the religious authorities, but the not so good news is that we aren't like the disciples either. Rather if anything, Brown insisted, we are most like Pontius Pilate. What Brown meant by this is that most of us are only lukewarm when it comes to Jesus. Like Pilate we are well meaning. Like Pilate we also want to do the right thing. We may even go so far as to hail Jesus as a king and even as our king but that's as far as we will go.

One of the hymns that we'll be singing during today's service is that wonderful hymn of discipleship and commitment, "Take my life and let it be". Consider these stirring words:

Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use,
every power as thou shalt choose.

And,

Take my will and make it thine,
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own,
it shall be thy royal throne.

These wonderful words clearly imply that Jesus is not only the King, but our King and the boss of our lives so-to-speak.

I have never forgotten a woman who is no longer with us who absolutely hated this hymn; in fact she often complained whenever we sang it. But why did she dislike it so much? Because, she said, it was so hypocritical. We sing these words she said, but we don't really mean them so what's the point? We sing for example that Jesus is the King and that we will do anything and everything for him, that not a mite we'll withhold and that our hearts are his royal throne, but honestly? We don't really mean this so why should we sing it? Now was she right? Are we at least a little bit hypocritical when we sing this hymn and many other such hymns? Do these wonderful hymns of discipleship make us feel good and committed but that's as far as it goes? This is a personal question with a personal answer but that brings us to today's challenge.

All around us are signs and reminders of the season soon to be, or perhaps even is already upon us. There is the parade this afternoon, and the malls and stores are decorated. Some radio stations are now playing Christmas music all day every day. Every evening more and more houses have Christmas lights on. Within the church itself we begin Advent next Sunday which is, as if it were, the countdown to Christmas. But before we get so caught up in it all we pause today to remember who and what the babe lying in the manger is and what he means for our lives. Who is Jesus? Is he the King? Is he our King? Who's the boss anyways? If Jesus truly is the boss and King of our lives, then how do we show it? How will we show it, and not just in the coming weeks leading up to Christmas either?

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, hear us as we come to you in prayer on this Sunday that is set aside to remember who and what your Son is and what he means for us and our lives.

The Bible uses so many images and ideas to capture at least a bit of who and what your Son is: the Alpha and Omega, the Lamb, the Bread of Life, and the Good Shepherd. He is called the Christ or the Messiah as well, but today

we remember one image in particular; the King. As the Lord and King of all creation, your Son is both the one who is in charge and the ultimate authority. We thank you for this, praying that you will help us to enthrone him in our lives; grant that we may truly be his faithful obedient subjects.

We pray for the sake of your kingdom here on earth, your church, and her ministry.

We pray for the sake of your world with all of its trials and tribulations, remembering the people of Afghanistan facing hunger and hardship as their country ceases to function. We pray for the hungry of our own land and community, even as the economy continues to struggle to cope with the pandemic.

We especially remember this day the people of British Columbia, coping with a disaster on a scale that most of us have never experienced and cannot even begin to imagine. We remember the farmers who have seen their crops and livestock wiped out, people who have lost their homes and their livelihoods. We pray that you will comfort, strengthen, reassure, and guide as only you can.

We pray for all who grieve this day and all who are ill, praying for their well-being.

With the parade this afternoon we give you thanks for this season that is now beginning, praying that you will help us to remember what it is truly all about; the birth of our Lord and Saviour, he who is the King of all creation. We pray that your Son's rule here on earth may, day by day, become an ever-greater reality. Help us too to do our part by word and deed to make it a reality.

We ask these things in your Son's name. Amen