

Pentecost 29B Christ Reigns  
Peace, Seattle  
November 22, 2015  
John 18:33-37

## **CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM**

**We're all about baptism today, which means we're all about two things: water and God's word of promise.**

**Water—life on this planet first came to be in water;**

- water covers nearly three quarters of Earth's surface...
- these bodies we walk around in are about 70% water
- Water is Earth's most precious resource, and we can't imagine life without it.

**We can't have baptism without water, yet we need something beside water for this sacrament. We need a word, and not just any word.**

**We need a Word from the One whose Spirit hovered over the waters from the beginning, we need a word from God.**

**And that is precisely what we get today!**

- A word that declares I LOVE YOU—YOU ARE MINE!
- A promise that says, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE.

**When we have both these things – precious water, and the precious promise of God, then we have the essential recipe for baptism...and yet, there is still something more...**

For no recipe is complete without a family with whom we can share it. And God has chosen that this sacred act take place not in isolation, but within the living community of God's people—and we are that community, all of us here, together.

Mateo and Juliana are being brought to this Font today, brought to the water and the word, in the company of their parents and families and sponsors. And they will go away from here full members of the community of God's people. The story of new birth, the story of adoption into the family of God will be their story.

We have an interesting array of texts to accompany us as we make that journey today, texts that serve as a lens through which we peer toward the kingdom of which we, in baptism, become citizens.

THE LORD IS KING, declares the psalm.

I WATCHED THE ANCIENT ONE TAKE HIS THRONE says Daniel in his vision.

I AM THE ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE ALMIGHTY, announces the Holy One in opening verses from Revelation.

**When the fog of history lifts and eyes once clouded by fear see clearly, these texts declare, there is but One who will remain standing, and it won't be any human ruler.**

**Unlike most church festival days, the origins of CHRIST THE KING or CHRIST REIGNS SUNDAY are modern rather than ancient.**

Motivated by the rising tides of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism; with the horror of WW1 still reverberating across the continent, **Pope Pius XI** instituted the FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING in 1925 on the 1600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicea. Today marks its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Against the backdrop of these nationalist movements, which would, within a few years, send the world into violent convulsions a second time, the Feast of Christ the King posed one simple question: **Who, finally, shall reign?**

**The answer of the New Testament is Jesus Christ.** It is he, the Lamb who was slain, who will reign; he whom we shall serve. And because his sovereignty is supreme, all the other allegiances we may bear—whatever their origins or claims upon us—are secondary.<sup>1</sup>

**But hold on for a moment... lest we think these texts amount to one more well worn chorus of MIGHT MAKES RIGHT—this time in a Christian key—we turn to our gospel, and find there this enigmatic scene of Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate.**

Pilate, representing the seemingly omnipotent Empire of Rome appears to be in charge of the proceedings. Jesus stands as a prisoner before him, betrayed by one of his inner circle, denied by another, and deserted by the rest.

ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS? Pilate asks him.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO BE HANDED OVER BY YOUR OWN PEOPLE?

MY KINGDOM IS NOT FROM THIS WORLD, he replies. IF IT WERE, MY FOLLOWERS WOULD BE FIGHTING TO KEEP ME FROM BEING HANDED OVER, BUT AS IT IS, MY KINGDOM IS NOT FROM HERE.

**We need to pay close attention here.**

For centuries, the King James translation dominated interpretations of this scene. The King James rendered Jesus' words like this: MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.<sup>2</sup>

That rendering of the Greek became a kind of proof text for Christians who'd determined that faith had nothing to do with life in the real world; had nothing to do with political or economic or social policies and their consequences—

**“After all,” came the response, “didn’t Jesus say, ‘My kingdom is not of this world?’”**

The translation before us today is a better and, more importantly, consistent rendering of what we hear and see in the Jesus of the gospels; who calls the structures of power to account, who preaches good news to the poor, who overturns the money changers tables in the Temple, who counts among his followers tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners of every kind.

When Jesus says MY KINGDOM IS NOT FROM THIS WORLD, the point is the SOURCE of his kingdom's authority, NOT the LOCATION of the kingdom's presence.

To say that Jesus' kingdom is not “from” this world, means it is not authorized or motivated nor does it receive orders from this world—which is not at all the same as saying his kingdom has nothing to do with this world. The scriptures make it quite clear that a faithful response to the reign of God taught by Jesus has EVERYTHING TO DO with how we live out our earthly citizenship.

<sup>1</sup> See article by Carey Gardiner Mack in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, October 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Hamm articulates the argument that follows in his article, *King-Talk*, in *America*, November 15, 1997.

Jesus' ministry has everything to do with this world, and so does ours, for this is the world God so loves. This is the world for which God gave the only son, the world God will not cease to woo back again, that we might receive life that truly is life.

Mateo and Juliana join us in becoming citizens of that world this morning, and it is from us that they will learn what citizenship under Jesus Christ means.

In the dominant version of history empires rise, violence begets violence, the quest for power reigns, and fear of the other leads us to pursue self-preservation at all cost.

But in the sub-version of history, revealed in the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, these empires are but a footnote; and it is a Lamb, not a warrior, who ascends the throne, redeeming our lives by giving his own, and thus making us whole.

**Let us pray.**

Lord Jesus, we cannot repay you for what you have done for our sake. But we can live our lives with gratitude, and by our living show the world what you have made us: your very own daughters and sons, water-washed and spirit-born, called at font and table to bear your redeeming love to all the world. Remind us today of who we are, and send us out as blessing-bearers to your whole creation. Amen.