

HOMILY FOR THE REIGN OF CHRIST, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24TH, 2024
JOHN 18: 33 – 37

I am sure that the thought is going through the minds of at least some of you, “You again?” Well, yes it is only two weeks since I was last at this lectern to launch our 2024 Stewardship Campaign. I am back again to mark that with the offertory today all the pledges received to date will be placed on the altar and blessed as the commitment of the people of this parish for 2025. I remind you that in many respects this is the church’s New Year’s Eve.

Today is known as Feast of the Reign of Christ. The Feast is a quite new in the church. The Roman Catholic Church introduced it in 1925. It does not appear in the Anglican Church of Canada’s 1962 Book of Common Prayer. Instead in the BCP, today is the Sunday Next Before Advent. In the 1985 Book of Alternative Services, today is known as the Last Sunday after Pentecost: The Reign of Christ.

As new as the feast might be, it is a very appropriate occasion to present the commitments of faithful people to the work of Christ in this parish, Jesus, both man and eternal Christ as our example. Jesus was fully human and fully God because the indwelling of the eternal Christ, in a entirely singular way, made him both human and divine. Remember the first part of the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own and his own people did

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not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

We are children of God who were born, not of blood or the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God in our baptism. Because we are children of God, we are charged with doing God's work in the world, that is why our stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure matter so much and why our commitment is to be sanctified upon the altar on this feast day.

It is not easy to think of these things: God and human at one and the same time. It can make your head hurt. We come from a long tradition of division which runs right back to Cain and Abel, the Tower of Babel, Joseph and his brothers, et cetera. In a curious development, theology once was known as the Queen of the Sciences, is coming to be aided by science. I said in a homily at Evening Prayer on Wednesday last, we would have to be disordered fools to believe that there is any real difference amongst us when science tells us that 99.9% of every human's DNA is identical to that of every other human. But we are all too ready to set up barriers against those whose .1% is different than ours. Similarly our long tradition of division shapes our mind and we are comforted by obvious duality – right/wrong, true/false, good/bad, human/divine. Well again science is coming to our aid in expanding our minds and our souls.

Most of us are pre-digital people. My, first job out of university was teaching typing on manual typewriters. We have been dragged, sometimes kicking and screaming, into the digital age. We have finally managed to understand the computers we use, however, inexpertly. Some of us know that it is all a question

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of, is it 0 or is it 1 and the interaction between the two makes it all work. That is why we call it digital. That is pretty easy to understand because it suits our tremendously dual minds – one thing, or the other.

Then along comes something altogether different: Quantum Theory which posits and increasingly proves that it can be 1 or it can be 0 and it can be either 0 or 1 interchangeably, and it can be both 0 and 1 at the same time. The prospects for solving major problems in our world when we finally make quantum theory, quantum practice are mind-boggling. How ironic that the scientists that we thought foes of religion may teach us who are religious how to understand the mystics behind the Gospel of John who knew that Jesus during his earthly life was both God and man because the eternal Christ was not born with him, but was born in him. All creation is one and creation is more than the earth, it the entire Cosmos, and every created thing is one with every other.

Let me turn now to the reading we have from John's Gospel today with Jesus before Pilate.

Some key lines; Are you the King of the Jews? My kingdom is not from this world. So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Can you hear the obviously intelligent, cut to the chase Pilate asking his wonderfully dualistic question: Are you a King or are you not? The confused response to Jesus' answer, so you are a king and the almost cheeky response from Jesus, you say so! You almost pity Pilate. How can a man of 0's and 1's deal with someone who is both and, and more at the same time?

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Jesus response to Pilate clearly raises the questions, what is a kingdom and who is a king?

Well here we have a culture clash. Pilate comes out of a Greco-Roman cultural base that is all about duality and precision between elements of truth and error, good and evil. Clarity around the boundaries matter. Jesus comes out of an Aramaic-Semitic culture where words have multiple meanings depending upon the tone of voice, body language, and how they are aspirated. What is more, in that culture time is most assuredly not linear but circular. For heaven's sake, how could one expect anything else of a people who have seen their Temple built, destroyed, rebuilt, desecrated, and restored and destroyed yet again. A people in captivity in Egypt, placed in the promised land, conquered by the Assyrians, exiled to Babylon, restored to Judah, subjected to Seleucid Empire; restored to a free people, completely subjugated to Rome, and by the time we get to the writing of John's Gospel, their Temple destroyed yet again. How could time seem anything other than circular?

Most of us born between 1930 and 1960, and that is most of us, have been distorted about time throughout our lives as things from 1945 got better, and better, at least for us, That progressive linear direction has limited our perception of time. In many respects that is why the present day is so dislocating because we seem to be regressing. Democracy is in retreat, authoritarianism is on the rise. It wasn't supposed to be that way by our lights. We were moving inexorably forward and now it doesn't seem so. I said when Russia invaded Ukraine and the far right was surging in so many places, "how did I go to bed one night and wake up in 1938?"

People who are vastly less fortunate than we, get that time is circular. Rains come, rains go; wars come, wars go; pestilence comes, pestilence goes. But the

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circle will be repeated. Perhaps one of our greatest impediments to understanding the bible is that we are linear people, not circular.

In addition to the culture clash over time, we have a problem of language. Aramaic has very few words, not many more than 2000. Compare that to contemporary English that has at least 170,000 in active use. Aramaic relied not so much on different words to convey meaning as it did on differences in tone, posture, and how much breath one used in the pronunciation. Whereas in English and most modern European languages in keeping with our world view of division and separation words mean very specific things. So in the question are you the King of the Jews there is no subtlety— a king is a king is a king. Jesus' response, my kingdom is not of this world might be restated: my kingdom does not fit in your world view.

When I was a seminarian more than 40 years ago, I was very impressed with a book the name of which I cannot remember, nor can I be sure who the author was. But the thesis within the book that I remember so very well that it has stuck with me over the 4+decades is that all you can really truthfully say about God is God is! As soon as you add a complement – in the grammatical sense – especially if that complement is a noun, to the sentence God is, you limit God. So if you say as Pilate does are you the King of the Jews you have immediately pigeon holed God in this case the eternal Christ because God is so much more than a king. It doesn't matter what the noun is teacher, helper, lord, defender, creator any you can think up can only diminish God because God is all that and so much more. That is why Pilate has so much trouble with Jesus because Jesus will not limit himself by seeking an identity within Pilate's world view. Pilate was likely speaking to Jesus in Greek, so even the language which reflects either or mentality cannot accommodate the sense of God that can be captured in a language based on oneness like Aramaic.

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Another problem with the limiting of God with the use of words like king, lord, et cetera is that you end up attributing God-like status to earthly kings or lords. We have 2000 years at least of according unwarranted God-like status to kings, and lords while at the same time by so according the status we place burdens on them that no human could hope to carry.

Even the name of our festival today, the reign of Christ, is problematic. Because Kings and Queens have reigns and reigns end. Our God, Creator, eternal and cosmic Christ and life-giving spirit was before time, is now, and will be even after the end of time.

In our time all God asks of us is to work for the end of division, work to restore the oneness, work to build God's peace in the now. That is why the commitments we make that will be blessed on the altar today are so important. God has inspired us to make them, and God will give us the strength to keep them, and we will be made ever more whole and ever more one by so doing. Amen, Happy New Year.