

Today is the last day of the church year; the Festival of Christ the King. We know that a king is one with absolute authority that cannot be questioned. Over time, such leaders have also been called sultans, Caesars, queens, pharaohs, dictators, emperors, chiefs, or czars. A king is an absolute ruler, and anyone not a king has no say in how to respond to the demands of a king.

Most people resent the authority of a king. Most would rather not have an absolute ruler controlling their lives. We say "we don't want others giving direction, commands, or orders." But, if we are honest, we daily submit to the rule of many such rulers or "kings."

Global warming, political correctness, television, Facebook, the stock exchange, insurance and taxes, iPhone and Alexa exert more and more daily control over our lives. We claim that we would never bow to a king, and yet we give authority all over the place to the rulers of our culture and our desires. The result is that we enslave ourselves willingly to the powers of a broken and selfish world. We serve the interests of others who subtly and overtly demand our allegiance, our time, and our money.

As we lift up Christ as king of the universe, we realize that we must make a decision about which king we shall follow and bow down to. It isn't that there aren't kings, but rather that we must decide which king we will serve. So often we rush into allegiance and subservience without even realizing the trap we have entered.

Ancient Israel was like that. They had survived the desert led only by God's love, but saw that all the villages in Canaan were ruled by kings. They felt left out and demanded God allow them to have a king as well. Samuel said, "You don't need a king! God is your king!" But they argued, "We want kings we can see, earthly rulers, like everyone else! God owes us a king." Samuel warned about the dictatorial, arbitrary, and selfish demands a king would bring but they persisted, "We don't care. We want a king."

God reminded, "I have always taken care of you; why do you need a king?" And like Adam and Eve, sinful people always feel God doesn't understand. That earthly rulers will more likely give us what we demand. Unfortunately kings eventually decide to be treated as gods, saying "give us more taxes, send your children as servants, and don't question any of our choices or decisions." It didn't take long for Israel to forget that God was their king, and instead they followed earthly rulers who led them to ruin.

Pilate asked the \$64,000 question with the words, "What kind of king are you?" Jesus was confusing because he came as a different kind of king. Instead of throne, he came to serve and offer love to all people, especially those who had nothing of benefit to the king. Instead of raising an army and surrounding himself with wealth, he brought healing, exorcism, forgiveness and love to lives that were broken and empty. Instead of a beautiful palace and monuments to his greatness he buried himself in a simple tomb. Unlike any king the world has ever known, he came not to be served but

to serve. He came not to build up his wealth and power but to surrender everything out of love, so that we would feel the warmth of a mighty God whose greatest gift is love.

Pilate sensed he was in the presence of a special kind of king. And so he washed his hands as an attempt to escape. He didn't want to condemn Jesus and he didn't want to upset the scribes and Pharisees. He was worried about losing control of the situation and so he washed his hands, he said "I quit. I choose not to make a choice." But that in itself was a choice as Pilate abandoned the power he had and allowed the jealousy, anger and envy of earthly rulers to back him into a corner and he allowed Jesus to die. Even today, handwashing is no solution. In reality it is a vote against Jesus!

Today, and every day, it is we, not Pilate, who stand between Jesus and world. Will we follow the noise of the crowd and the demand of earthly powers or will we respond to the trumpet blast of Easter? Will we bow down to the shouts and demands of a selfish world, or will we seek for our lives to songs of love for King who gave life for me?

Remember the story of Robin Hood, who lived in a kingdom where the king had gone missing and in the vacuum evil had taken control of the kingdom? Robin and his followers remained faithful to the real king, and undertook a holding action of service and care for all – seeking true justice, until the return of the king.

The Church has same call today as we await promised return of KING! Which king will you follow? In which kingdom will you live? The actions of your schedule, your time and your treasure witness to the world around you who you chose to follow as king! Be faithful and fruitful as we await HIS return!

Here is what John's Gospel might sound like if YOU take the place of Pilate: YOU now enter the Judgment Hall and say to Jesus, "Are you the king of the people?" Jesus answers YOU, "Do you ask because you really care, or are you just pretending to be concerned about my kingdom? Are you offering mere lip service or are you prepared for life-service?" YOU answer, "But the whole world has given up on you, abandoned you -- our neighbors, our writers, our elected leaders, our friends, television and newspaper reporters -- they all say you are not a real king. They say that money, weapons, physical beauty, large amounts of money and power are the rulers -- the kings of this world!"

Jesus answers, "My kingdom is NOT of this world. If it were, would have destroyed every wicked empire, every disease, every dictator and tyrant. I would have prevented myself from crucifixion. I would have arrested all who oppose me. I would have acted like an earthly king! But my kingdom is NOT of this world!" And YOU ask again, "well what kind of king is that?" And Jesus answers: "It is for YOU that I was born. For each of you that I came into this world! I have come solely to point you to the truth. If you believe in me, you believe in God. Everyone who believes in God lives for him and not for herself or himself. Now, which king *will you choose to serve?* In which kingdom *will you choose to live?*" [TWSeeber]