

Sermon Notes for 11/22/15 (Christ the King Sunday)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: John 18:33-37

Theme: THE KINGDOM OF TRUTH, OUT OF THIS WORLD!

The Point: Faith in Christ makes us citizens of a kingdom that is “from another place,” one that is governed only by His truth and unified by His love.

Introduction: The kingdom of truth – out of this world! This is one of those sermon themes that just cries out for some sort of visual. If we had the capability in the sanctuary, I would show you one of the dramatic pictures from the Hubble telescope of “the eye of the cosmos” or a distant star cluster exploding or the Butterfly Nebula or some such thing. Those sights are “out of this world,” for sure. But those sights, spectacular as they may be, cannot hold a candle to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus, the kingdom of truth.

It is interesting, isn't it, that Jesus says that, if His kingdom were from this world, his servants would be fighting to prevent Him from being handed over to the Jews. If Jesus' kingdom were of this world, swords and other weapons would be employed to enforce the will of the citizens of that kingdom. In other words, if Jesus' kingdom were of this world, He would not have been crucified. After all, the crucifixion of the King is an embarrassment. So much so that many religious teachers have denied that Jesus was actually put to death in this horrendous way. Some say that there was a substitute for Jesus who died on the cross intended for Him. But if that is the case, then our sins are still standing and accusing us before the Father.

In the Qur'an we read, “That they said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah’;- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself. (*Qur'an, sura 4 (An-Nisa) ayat 157-158*) The Muslim interpretation of what actually happened on Calvary is not unanimous, but all insist that Jesus did not die by crucifixion, but that He was miraculously raised to heaven by Allah. That would be a feasible explanation if Jesus' kingdom were of this world, if it were like the other kingdoms with which we are familiar, if He were focused on success and earthly achievement.

But it is not that way! “My kingdom is not from this world,” Jesus declares in the presence of Pilate as He is being questioned prior to His crucifixion. What does this mean? For one thing, it means that Christ's kingdom does not run along the same rules and guidelines that govern earthly kingdoms. We are familiar enough with the way that our worldly kingdoms run, aren't we?

Among earthly kingdoms, a nation's power is built on the military and economic and strategic strength of that nation. If our nation can bomb your nation into the cave-man era, then we have a definite edge in all negotiations and agreements. If our nation can plumb the depths of your technological and military secrets, then we can blackmail you into doing what we want. If our nation possesses the strategic resources that you need, then we can convince you to be our friend by blackmail.

Christ's kingdom is not established by such means. Instead, He governs by the power of His grace and mercy. He rules by the power of His forgiveness, indeed by the power of His blood. “To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion.” The blood of Christ, the sign of defeat and shame, His very death on a cross, becomes the source of our forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Christ's blood establishes His kingdom as the kingdom of God, who loves and gives and redeems people for Himself. This is power that is out of this world, since it originates from the heart and the throne of God Himself.

Earthly kingdoms are founded on principles of inequity. Some are higher in power and authority than others, and those who are masters and rulers lord it over those beneath them. That truth can make for some strange interactions. When Christian Herter was governor of Massachusetts back in the 1950's, he was running hard for a second term in office. One day, after a busy morning chasing votes (during which he had no opportunity for lunch) he arrived at a church barbecue. It was late afternoon and Herter was famished. As Herter moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line.

"Excuse me," Governor Herter said, "do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?" "Sorry," the woman told him. "I'm supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person." "But I'm starved," the governor said. "Sorry," the woman said again. "Only one to a customer." Governor Herter was a modest and unassuming man, but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around. "Do you know who I am?" he said. "I am the governor of this state." "Do you know who I am?" the woman said. "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along, mister." (*Bits & Pieces*, May 28, 1992, pp. 5-6) The rulers of this world play the game of authority constantly, and oftentimes it gets them nowhere.

Christ's kingdom is altogether different. By the power of His self-giving, He has raised every one of His children to a place of importance. He willingly stood in the place of the rejected, the humiliated, the scorned, the condemned, so that we could be called "priests serving his God and Father." That is a high and holy calling that is really out of this world. It begins with the Lord who is King preeminently from the cross. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has said, "The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard." Christ's kingdom is not marked by its "success," but by its service to others.

Of course, there are some who want to remake the cross, to take away the sting of it, the ugliness of it, the harshness of it. Of this enterprise, A.W. Tozer writes, "The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it." When we are tempted to turn the cross into merely a gaudy pendant to be worn on a well-tanned neck, we miss the point also. As we are called by the Master to pick up our crosses daily and follow Him, this means a willingness to walk the same road that Jesus Himself walked – patiently enduring pain and trouble and grief in order to serve as a blessing to others.

Earthly kingdoms come and go, sometimes with amazing speed. Even the greatest of empires have had limited staying power. One encyclopedia listing gives the names of 218 empires that have been in power throughout known history, including the French, the British, the Manchurian, the Russian, the Han, the Ming, the Tang, the Ottoman, the Yuan, the Roman, the Spanish, the Mongol, and ever so many more dynasties, empires, duchies, kingdoms – all have passed into history (some may still be holding on, just barely). Human attempts to centralize and maintain power and control have eventually met with failure.

But the kingdom of Christ is not that way. Daniel reports this observation about the one that he saw in his vision, one like a Son of Man, who was presented to the Ancient One: "His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed." Out of this world? You bet! Where else would a kingdom find such permanence, except from the authority and dominion of the Creator and Lord of the universe?!

Sitting majestically atop the highest hill in Toledo, Spain, is the Alcazar, a 16th-century fortress. During the civil war of the 1930's, the Alcazar became a battleground when Loyalists tried to oust Nationalists, who held the fortress. During one dramatic episode, the Nationalist leader received a phone call while in his office at the Alcazar. It was from his son, who had been captured by the Loyalists. The ultimatum: If the father didn't surrender the Alcazar to them, they would kill his son. The father weighed his options. After a long pause and with a heavy heart, he said to his son, "Then die like a man." (*Daily Walk*, April

16, 1992) One could imagine those words coming from heaven as Jesus prays, “Not my will, but thine be done!” “Son, die like a man (and like My Son), for the salvation of the world.” And from that action, the Father proves, I will build a kingdom that will never pass away.

One teacher has written about Jesus, “This is the Lord and king that Christ’s Church confesses. Not a king who takes children, and servants, and land, and imposes taxes, but one who instead welcomes children, takes the form of a slave, has no place to lay his head, and loses his life for his subjects. It is to him that we are inspired to testify: His holiness befits God’s household, and as if that weren’t enough, he willingly shares that holiness, so that by faith we too may confess: The Lord is king. His throne is everlasting. His decrees are sure, and that means we have life.” (Lori Cornell) This King Jesus is the King who will never be thrown off the throne, who will never be overcome by rebellious subjects, whose kingdom will never be destroyed by economic or natural disasters. This king calls us to worship Him and to enjoy life in His fellowship, in His kingdom, forever, beginning now, here, today. “Come and share in my body,” He invites you, “because there you are made citizens of an everlasting kingdom.”

Earthly kingdoms are built for the sake of those who belong to it. The debate going on in our country right now about immigration is an example of this. We have those who emphasize the safety of our US citizens, while others want to emphasize the needs of those who are not (or not yet) citizens of this land. The government is bound by law to defend its citizens. To extend protection or defense to others is a sign of compassion, not a legal requirement.

The kingdom of Christ continues to grow and expand in service of those who are not yet a part of it. This is an “other-worldly” purpose and direction. It has often been said that the Church is the one organization in the world that exists, not for its own benefit, but for the good and welfare of those who are yet to know the Good News of God’s love in Jesus Christ. John Piper has said, “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.” In other words, because God’s desire is for passionate heart-worship by people from every tongue and language and tribe and people group, we carry to all of them the news that God loves them for Jesus’ sake and that their sins are put away through Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary.

A few weeks after its passage by the Continental Congress in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed by fifty-six men. Their conviction resulted in untold sufferings for themselves and their families. Of the 56 men, five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships sunk by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in poverty. At the battle of Yorktown, the British General Cornwallis had taken over Thomas Nelson's home for his headquarters. Nelson quietly ordered General George Washington to open fire on the Nelson home. The home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt.

John Hart was driven from his wife's death bed. Their thirteen children fled for their lives. His fields and mill were destroyed. For over a year, he lived as an elderly man in forest and caves, returning home only to find his wife dead and his children vanished. Though at one point the largest landowner in the region, he sacrificed for the country, allowing Washington’s army of 12,000 to camp on his land during harvest season. He died penniless and owing money. (Kenneth L. Dodge, *Resource*, Sept./ Oct., 1992, p. 5) These men and many others knew what it meant to pledge their lives, their fortune, and their sacred honor to the establishment of the land of the free and the home of the brave. How much more ought we to be willing to sacrifice to leave the benefits of an eternal kingdom to our heirs and our children!

Conclusion: Faith in Christ makes us citizens of a kingdom that is “from another place,” one that is governed only by Jesus, who is the Truth, and unified by His love. We do not need to try to defend this

kingdom or to preserve it. We are called on to announce its arrival and to live as those who are already enjoying a kingdom-centered life that is eternal. We are here together in worship for the sake of those who are not yet here in worship of the Savior. And this day we pledge ourselves to the service and worship of the King, who rules forever, our Lord and Savior Jesus the Messiah, AMEN!