

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Christ the King
November 25, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
His kingdom is out of this world!

—John 18:33-37

If a king were standing right in front of you, do you think you'd notice? Even though it's far removed from our reality, people of royalty fascinate us. That's why a few months ago, American news channels had extensive coverage of the royal wedding. People even on this side of the pond stayed up to the wee hours of the morning to catch the royal I dos. There's just something fascinating about royalty. Maybe it's the extravagant lifestyle. Maybe it's because of the power and influence behind the title. There's just something about royalty that catches our eye.

In today's lesson, a Roman governor who, no doubt, rubbed shoulders with some pretty powerful people actually stood before the King of heaven and earth. And he had to ask, "Are you a king?" He asked Jesus, "***Are you the king of the Jews?***" He merely asked this question because that was the charge that was brought against Jesus, that he claimed to be the king of the Jews. But Jesus answered Pontius Pilate with a question, "***Is that your own idea,***" Jesus asked, "***or did others talk to you about me?***" What do you think, Pontius Pilate? Do you recognize me as a king? The whole time Pilate really wanted nothing to do with this seemingly trivial religious dispute. He didn't see Jesus as a threat to the Roman government. He merely saw a meek man with no basis for the charge that was brought against him. He certainly didn't see a king standing right in front of him.

And here's why. Jesus said, "***My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.***" Why didn't Pilate see Jesus as a king? Why didn't many of Jesus' own people see him as king? Very simply, because his kingdom is not of this world. It's like none other. There is no other kingdom on earth like it. There is no king like Jesus Christ. His kingdom is extraordinary. It is a kingdom above all kingdoms. His kingdom is out of this world.

Jesus and his kingdom are set apart from the kingdoms and kings of this world in more ways than one. Kings in Jesus' day were distinguished by their royal blood. Even though Jesus was from the line of David, he was just the son of a carpenter from the no-name town of Nazareth, not the royal city of Jerusalem. Kings in Jesus' day rolled around town in chariots, as symbols of strength. Not Jesus. He was carried into town on a little donkey. Kings in Jesus' day were lauded for their victories and conquests. Not Jesus. He had just been arrested and his twelve closest subjects fled on foot without putting up a fight. Nope. There is no other king like Jesus. Therefore, Pontius Pilate and many others concluded, "He mustn't be a king."

So, what do you think? Is Jesus a king? In answering that question, you and I have a great advantage over Pontius Pilate. We have faith that looks beyond the outward appearances. We know and believe he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. We know that his kingdom is out of this world; it's from another place. So for us, it is no problem to confess, "Christ is King." But let me ask you a different question. Is Christ *your* King? Practically speaking, is Christ *your* King? That is, does he rule your heart and your life? Or does something or someone else ever rule it?

If Christ whose kingdom is out of this world isn't ruling my heart, then something of this world will. Maybe sometimes certain fears and doubts rule our hearts in place of Christ. It's like a reign of terror. Maybe the fear of what certain people think of you. Maybe the fear of being left out or forgotten. Maybe the fear of rejection. Maybe the fear of disease or even death. You name your fear. What is it that keeps you up at night worrying? Whatever it is, fear is not a good alternative to Christ your king.

Does materialism ever compete against Jesus for the throne of your heart? If so get ready because it's already launched a full-on campaign this season. When materialism seeks to rule our hearts, its campaign is one of empty promises. All these things promise to make our lives better, or more fulfilling, or they promise to bring families together. You've seen the commercials for black Friday. You'll get the cyber Monday emails tomorrow. The ads for products are never realistic. It shows a family gathering together in the driveway around the new car and everything's wonderful. How come those car commercials never show the dad at the auto mechanic cringing as they hand him a bill for 1,200 dollars? That's what's going to happen. Yet we let the gifts that God has given us become the things that rule our hearts and occupy our minds. It's so easy because they're right in front of us. We can touch them with our hands. They provide at least a brief moment of security. But in the end, materialism is never a good alternative to Christ our king.

What is it that rules over you at times? Is it fear? Is it wealth? Is it ever yourself—"I call the shots. I'm in control?" Is there a specific sin that rules you and governs you? Many are the kings of this world that could occupy the throne of our hearts. But nothing in all the earth can even come close to Christ and his kingdom. In fact all the kings and kingdoms this world have already or will one day come to nothing. The Roman Empire under whose authority Christ was crucified, what has come of this kingdom? Or what about any other kingdom or empire of the past? They've all come to nothing. What happens if Christ isn't our king and we aren't of his kingdom? Well then, like all the kingdoms of the past, we too will perish.

All the things and all the kings of this world will perish from this world. But not Jesus. There is not other kingdom like his. His kingdom is extraordinary. His kingdom is beyond our imagination. His kingdom is out of this world. Jesus and his kingdom are set apart from the kingdoms and kings of this world in more ways than one.

Christ the King's rule is not a reign of terror, but his is a kingdom of grace. Jesus doesn't rule the subjects of his kingdom with threats. He rules the hearts of his people by his grace—his underserved love for sinners. No other kingdom or government on this earth works that way. All earthly governments are established and upheld by laws. But his kingdom is out of this world. He comes to sinners with frightened and terrified consciences because of our sin, and how does he deal with them? A king of this world would punish and banish us forever. But not Jesus. In his great love, Christ *your* king laid down his life on the cross. In his mercy, he does not banish you from his kingdom, but he pardons all your sin—freely, completely, by his own suffering and death. That's grace. And by that grace, Christ rules your heart. It's not a reign of terror, but one of pardon and peace.

Christ the King's campaign is not one of empty promises, but he rules with the truth. That's what he told Pilate: ***"I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*** Jesus Christ the King never minced his words. His words are not empty. He came to speak the truth. He testified to the truth about sin, and how serious it is. But he also testified to the truth about himself, that he is the only Savior from sin. Christ *your* king has established his kingdom in your heart by that truth. To trust that truth and believe that your sins are pardoned by Christ the King, is to say, "Christ is *my* King!" And when Christ is *your* King it is evident as you take his truth to heart and listen to his every word of truth. You bow before Christ *your* king when you stop trying to call the shots and pretend to be the king of your life and simply listen to him as he speaks to you in his word. When Christ *your* King calls something a sin listen to him. He speaks the truth. When he calls you to repent of that sin, listen to *your* king and approach his throne of grace. When he says, "take heart, that sin and all your sins are forgiven," listen to him. He speaks the truth.

To confess Christ as King, and to stand on his side, the side of truth, sometimes seems pretty inglorious to this world. When we confess with our words and our lives that Christ is our king, the world does not treat us like royalty. Like Pilate scoffed at Christ our King, so the world may scoff at us. That's because we are part of Christ's kingdom, and remember, his kingdom is out of this world. Think of all the kingdoms of this world once seemed so great and glorious. And yet where are they today? Great kings of the world once seemed so powerful. But where are they today? Even the trivial things of this world that have ruled us; do they still bring the same joy that they once did? The glory of this world and all who belong to this world will soon fade and perish forever. But not Jesus, and not his kingdom, and not his royal subjects. The glory of Christ *your* King will be revealed and his kingdom that is now hidden will be revealed and it will endure forever. How do we even begin to describe what that kingdom of glory will be like? It will be like nothing we have ever experienced on this earth. It will be awesome. It will be extraordinary. It will be out of this world!

The Peace of Christ *your* King rule in your hearts, now and forever. Amen