

John 18:33-37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, '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.'

The King of Truth

"Truth" is a big word, isn't it? It's a big word with a very positive meaning. We are taught from the time we can speak to "tell the truth," and just as we're expected to tell the truth we start to hold our parents to the same standard, trusting that they will indeed tell us the truth and getting very upset when we determine that Mommy or Daddy have lied to us. In school we are trained to discern truth from falsehood in order to perform well on tests, so knowing what is true is quite important for our success both in school and in vocations. As we search for our life's soul mate we pursue "true" love, love that is "tried and true" and can be trusted to last forever.

Of course "Truth" with a capital T is bigger than the sum of all the little truths that we learn in school. Truth is bigger than the relationship we have with our spouses or our parents. It's more than "not lying." Ultimately Truth is something that is so big that it's hard to get our heads around. It's like God; we know that it exists, and we know that it is extremely important, but we can't easily define it. Truth is one of the reasons we are gathered here now because we are all yearning for Truth in a world that so often deceives us and lies to us. Sadly it is the pursuit of Truth that leads many away from church and other faith communities because even those we recognize as leaders in those communities have been known to deceive us. It's our pursuit of Truth that can cause us to journey over oceans and continents, and

can bring us to the heights of ecstatic joy and to the depths of despair. Truth, whether we admit it or not, is our greatest quest in life.

And Jesus is all about Truth; in fact I title this sermon “The King of Truth” because anyone who seeks Truth will find it in Jesus. That doesn’t mean that all your questions will be answered through Jesus, but the more you seek Jesus through prayer and meditation, through the written word, and through a faith community, the more you will be nourished in Truth, and the more you are nourished in Truth the greater will be your joy and your peace in life.

Today marks the end-of-the-year on the Christian calendar, and we give this day two titles – Christ the King Sunday and Reign of Christ Sunday – which really is redundant but the title reminds us that every Sunday and every holiday is about Jesus and points to Jesus, and the sooner we come to accept that Christ is King of our lives and Christ reigns supreme in our hearts the sooner we will feel fulfilled and the sooner we will find that peace and that joy for which we search. The sooner our lives will feel true to us.

Because often our lives don’t feel true to us. We struggle to live our lives the right way, but we stumble so often. I was reading about a famous song that concerns how we live our lives; it’s called “My Way” written by Paul Anka for Frank Sinatra who made it famous. It became an anthem for self-reliance, autonomy, and individuality. It’s a popular song at funerals to celebrate a life of someone who we respect for being fiercely independent. But even though Frank Sinatra made this song famous he hated the song, describing it as self-serving and self-indulgent. Many people associated Frank Sinatra’s success with the viewpoint depicted in that song, that we must be staunchly independent, but Frank was perceptive enough to see that a life that is self-serving and self-indulgent, a life spent doing things “my way” is not a satisfying life. It’s not a life that rings true because Truth is something far greater than any individual.

But just as a life spent doing things “my way” is not a life well-spent, neither is a life spent doing things someone else’s way. There are a lot of people who get very caught up in trying to satisfy other people. It’s quite natural at your job or with your family; it’s a survival instinct to get along with other people, to make them

happy so that we can feel liked and therefore safe. We get so focused on pleasing our spouses or our children or our bosses that we become enslaved to them; we end up pursuing ways to please others instead of pursuing Truth, and we depend upon other's approval for our own sense of worth. THAT'S NOT TRUTH! That's just being safe. That is just surviving. And the *Truth* is that if you spend your life trying to satisfy the wrong people at the very least you will feel that your life has been wasted, and at worst you may be dragged down into committing terrible sins in your efforts to satisfy your master and find yourself having to use what has become known as The Nuremburg Defense: "I did it because I was told to do it." Doing things to please other people does not make your actions right or even excusable. Truth is about more than serving self or serving others. Truth is ultimately about serving God.

In our Gospel reading today we find Jesus in a quite a pickle. His very life is on the line, and it's on the line because his entire ministry has been about teaching people, through word and deed, ***what is Truth***, what is the will of God and how do we live according to God's will. What becomes apparent first and foremost in today's lesson is that pursuing God's will does not always coincide with the ways that this world so often operates. Pursuing God's will pits Jesus against a lot of the leaders of his religion and of the political order, against the high priests and against the governor of the province. It's a place that none of us would want to be. And the temptation would be to either not get into that situation to begin with or overpower the opposition – to suddenly be transformed into Chuck Norris and just Kung Fu our way out of danger. Our response would be what the physiologist Walter Bradford Cannon described as "fight or flight"; we either attack and defeat our opponents, or we run away from them to find safety. That's the way fallen humanity assesses the situation; those who oppose you are your enemies and you must either defeat them or flee from them. Jesus takes neither course of action. Why not? Because Jesus knows the Truth, and the Truth is that if he either fights or "flights" he is giving in to the kingdom of man and abandoning the kingdom of God. If Jesus overpowers others he's only perpetuating a system of domination where the strong man rules, and if he seeks to save his own life he is also perpetuating that system by allowing the bullies to rule. But a life spent in

Truth is not a life spent in the endless cycle of dominating or appeasing others. It is a life of integrity with God, with Truth. Jesus chooses to engage whoever he encounters not as an opponent but as a friend and as one who is beloved by God; he does not look at them as being dominant or weak, to be avoided or exploited. Instead he finds his footing in Truth and approaches others as those who should neither be indulged because they think they have power nor browbeaten because they think themselves weak. He must have rattled Pontius Pilate who was used to asking all the questions and receiving straight answers; he asks Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews" and Jesus responds with a **question**: "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" What an unusual *prisoner* Jesus is; he doesn't act like a prisoner at all because Jesus cannot really be a prisoner! Jesus knows that all authority rests with God, and no one who dwells with God can be anyone's prisoner. Dwelling with God means dwelling in Truth, and as Jesus himself says: "...The truth will make you free." (John 8:32).

So as I reflect on Thanksgiving I have to be thankful for you, that you are here now, not just because you listen to me but because together we can listen to Jesus, and we can help one another follow Jesus and so live our lives in Truth with the king of Truth. We don't find truth by trusting only in ourselves, and we don't find truth by trusting solely in others; we find truth by trusting in Jesus, and his word. May God open our ears to Truth, that we would seek God's kingdom with all our heart and mind and soul and strength and thus live our lives in true freedom, as God intends us to live.