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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE
Advent III – Midweek (dual parish service with Immanuel, Burns, WY)
December 16, 2015
Text: John 18:28–40; I Timothy 6:11–19

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The way we Americans think about kings, queens, and royal families is somewhat strange, at least in my opinion. On the one hand, we have a hard time appreciating the reality of a monarchy because our country was established upon a deliberate, conscience decision to reject all regal authority. We fought a civil war against the 18th century's version of a world super-power, England, in order to establish self-government. After the war was over and while we were facing the difficulties of establishing a government, many clamored to establish an American king, George Washington by name. He flatly refused, thus signaling the death of any royal pretensions on American soil.

On the other hand, can a week go by without the media reporting something about the British royal family? Royal weddings are huge media events in this country! As evidenced by the relatively recent marriage of Prince William, duke of Cambridge to Kate Middleton, duchess of Cambridge. And people seem to wait on pins and needles to learn the name of their newest child. Americans are fascinated with royal families, from a distance.

I wonder what that distant infatuation with royalty does to the way we think about Jesus being our King. We're fascinated with royalty on the one hand. But we don't want any part in kings and royalty making decisions that affect our daily lives. In this country at least, if we don't like our political leaders, we can vote them out at the next election.

But we can't vote Jesus off His royal throne. The fact of the matter is, Jesus is what the apostle Paul says He is in I Timothy 6:15, "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords." We may not have a political king overseeing the affairs of our country. But we do have a divine King who rules and reigns not only over our governmental politics – don't kids yourselves, Jesus rules over all political authority regardless of its form and make-up – but over every atom swirling around in

subatomic space to every solar system careening through cosmic space in the most distance galaxy. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

But His kingship is certainly of a different sort. Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea, certainly didn't understand King Jesus nor did the Jew of the day. I fear we struggle too.

Today's first reading was taken from John 18. The Jews had arrested Jesus, tried Him, and condemned Him for speaking blasphemy. Along the way they've rough Him up a bit with slapping, name-calling, spitting, and so forth. But they can't execute Jesus without Roman permission. So they take the Lord to Pilate in order to secure His order of execution.

But Pilate isn't immediately convinced. "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law" (vs. 31). Don't bother me with this trifling Jewish matter; he was shrewd enough to know that the Jewish leadership was being rather petty and vindictive. To this the Jews say, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death" (vs. 31).

In these words, Pilate sees that the Jewish leadership, petty though they be, are deadly serious and he will have to deal with Jesus whether he wants to or not. Pilate brings Jesus into his headquarters for questioning. Pilate cuts to the chase, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (vs. 33)

The Jews had been waiting for centuries for a new David to arise who would drive the cursed Romans out of the Holy Land. Are you claiming to be that King, Jesus? Are you a threat to Roman rule and authority? Jesus answers, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world" (vs. 36).

Jesus isn't like any earthly king. That's one thing we need to keep straight. In that regard, even my opening examples of the British monarchy and the American Revolution really don't quite do justice to our Lord's kingship. He's completely unlike King George III of 18th century England or King Salman of Saudi Arabia or Emperor Akihito of Japan. His rule isn't established by constitutions or any other form of human authority. Nor does He use human power or wisdom.

The clearest and most beautiful proofs that Jesus doesn't use human power and wisdom are two-fold. 1) The first proof is found in Jesus' own words to Pilate, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (vs. 37). Jesus' kingship is a kingdom of truth. Most kingdoms of the world are established upon raw power and authority. Our Lord's kingdom is a kingdom of truth.

For this reason – the purpose of truth – Jesus was born of a Virgin mother, preached to multitudes, healed the oppressed, and loved the world unto salvation. To bear witness to the truth that transcends, undergirds, and gives legitimacy to all true authority, to everything that is real. King Jesus is truth. Everything that contradicts His ways and teachings and kingship is a lie. It's a lie that it's natural for people to die. It's a lie that a little bit of sin is ok. It's a lie that it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you're sincere. It's all a lie. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth for He is the King of truth.

As reborn citizens of His kingdom, we strive to live according to truth in every thought, word, and deed. We can never adopt a relativistic view of truth so prevalent today. You know, what's true for you may not be true for me, kind of thinking. The Small Catechism teaches us about this eternal truth in the explanations to the 2nd Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come." What does this mean? Answer: "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also." In other words, this kingdom is real and true. We pray that it would come among us knowing that it will be done. This is no platonic kingdom of make-believe. It's established upon truth and goodness. It's established upon the Lord Jesus who rules and reigns over it in truth.

So we pray for Christ's kingdom to come among us for we desire, to the depths of our souls, to live in the truth. The next question the Catechism asks is "How does God's kingdom come?" Answer: "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity." In other words, God's kingdom is experienced when we live our lives in the truth revealed in God's Word through the power and grace of God's Holy Spirit.

2) The second proof to the claim that Jesus' kingship doesn't conform to the wisdom and practices of the world is seen in what immediately follows the reading from John 18. Pilate tried on several occasions to release Jesus. The Jews refused the King of

kings and asked for a murderous thief instead, Barabbas. He goes free. King Jesus is led to crucifixion. After being scourged almost to death and mocked mercilessly, Jesus is crucified between two criminals. The King of kings dies a criminal's death. Pilate knows the truth and places this inscription on the cross above Jesus' head, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (Jn.19:19).

In this grand act, death on behalf of the world, Jesus wins for Himself His kingdom established upon the truth of who He is and what He does. Three days later, King Jesus rises from the dead signaling that His kingdom cannot and will not be overcome even by death itself. No guns, or bullets, or swords, or laws, or statues. Only truth giving Himself in love for world that had believed a lie in the beginning of time. This is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He will come again on the Last Day. Until then, we live in His kingdom by faith through the power of Holy Spirit as we live in truth according to God's Word. But when King Jesus returns, we will experience His kingdom for all eternity.

Jesus of Nazareth: prophet, priest, and now king. As we prepare to celebrate His birth next week, remember what we've learned over this Advent season. Remember and rejoice. Jesus, our prophet, preached the truth of His kingdom and declared the promise of His return on the Last Day. Jesus, our priest, offered Himself as the sacrifice that takes away our sins and continually intercedes for us before His Father's throne. Jesus, our king, rules and reigns over heaven and earth through love and truth for our eternal good.

A blessed Advent and Christmas season to you all for Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.