

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
November 25, 2018

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Christ the King Sunday, Year B     John 18:33-37

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.  
Amen

We don't usually think about the passage we read from John's gospel this time of year. This is a Holy Week passage. We read another version of this conversation between Pilate and Jesus from one of the other gospels on Palm Sunday, sometimes called Passion Sunday. But this particular dialogue from John's gospel is a Good Friday reading.

Isn't it interesting how days are named? The fact that we call this day in Jesus' life "Good Friday" is one that children, probably many adults, often struggle with. Shouldn't it be more like the day of Jesus' betrayal, trial and crucifixion be named something like the Friday we just had a couple of days ago called "Black Friday"?

I looked up the history of the name "Black Friday". It seems that term started in the early 1960's in Philadelphia when the traffic of both cars and people covered the city as they swarmed in for their early Christmas shopping. I suppose from the sky the city looked black. The descriptor "Black" also refers to that day after Thanksgiving when many retailers finally turn a profit—toward being "in the black" rather than being "in the red."

I'm not much for crowds, and I have learned that even though many businesses provide some pretty enticing sales on Black Friday, they also offer good sales other days. So if a person pays attention they can get good deals on all kinds of products throughout the year. But there is something that draws people to follow the power of consumerism. We might even see that as one of the kings we follow—getting the good deal, getting more while spending less. Although we all know that most of us spend just as much, if not more, but we are happy to get even more for our money during these special sales.

So why, then, is Good Friday, the day of Jesus' trial and death, called "Good"?

The word "Good" may have come from an older term for that day, "God's Friday". But we use the term Good Friday now because we know the rest of the story. Jesus' rejection, suffering, and death that day made possible his resurrection—God's victory over sin and death. That is ultimately good news!

But following the triumphant readings for this festival day the conversation between Jesus and Pilate is not what we expect from the king God seems to have promised. The promise in Daniel is that all peoples, nations, and languages will serve him. Clearly in this moment in John's gospel Jesus has no one serving him, not even those who have been following him. Our Psalm declares the Lord to be robed in majesty and armed with strength. On that Good Friday Jesus is bound and will be mocked by those who place a purple robe on him.

And in the reading from Revelation, we see a vision of one so powerful he rides in on the clouds. But this is a future vision, and in the moment of his trial, Jesus seems to be as human and finite as any one of us.

This idea of Jesus as a king may be a difficult image for us to grasp, especially since we live in a country that is ruled by and for the people, rather than by a single figure head like a king. But that's what Jesus is telling us. Our images of human kings are not what define the kind of king Jesus is. In fact, Jesus turns those images upside down.

At the end of this morning's passage, Jesus says "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." He has said something like this before when he was speaking to the Pharisees. In John, chapter 10, Jesus said:

<sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

The rulers of this world—whether they be political powers or consumerism or competition of any kind—do not lay down their lives for the sake of others. They are self-serving kings. That's what makes Jesus a different kind of king. He is not a king that comes to conquer and devour nations, but he comes to call his sheep into a life of safety and care. And not just his own sheep—Jesus comes to call other sheep, like Pontius Pilate or the thieves that hung beside him on their crosses.

Jesus' power is seen in his choice to suffer and die as much as in the power of his resurrection. There's a song by Michael Card that speaks to this reversal of understanding of what it means for Jesus to be our king.

*Why did it have to be a friend who chose to betray the Lord?  
Why did he use a kiss to show them? That's not what a kiss is for.  
Only a friend can betray a friend, a stranger has nothing to gain.  
And only a friend comes close enough to ever cause so much pain.*

*And why did there have to be thorny crown pressed upon His head?  
It should have been a royal one made of jewels and gold instead.  
It had to be a crown of thorns because in this life that we live,  
for all who seek to love a thorn is all the world has to give.*

*And why did it have to be a heavy cross He was made to bear?  
And why did they nail His feet and hands when his love would have held Him there?  
It was a cross for on a cross a thief was supposed to pay.  
And Jesus had come into the world to steal every heart away.  
Yes, Jesus had come into the world to steal every heart away.*

*Songwriters: MICHAEL CARD*

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In Christ our King, may we know the truth of God's love for us—a truth that speaks of equity over consumerism, a truth that speaks peace over conflict, a truth that speaks the power of life over death. This is the good news of Christ the King, our Good Shepherd.

Thanks be to God! Amen