**What kind of King? John 18:33-38. November 21 2021**

Some of you may have seen episodes of the TV show “the Block” recently. I saw a few episodes much of the content was about the interpersonal dynamics of the contestants, I was really only interested in the renovation side of the show which sometimes, frustratingly, seemed to feature far less prominently in the show. There was a cheating scandal early in the show which dominated the whole series. The interpersonal tensions and accusations were stark. Throughout the whole show one of the couples caught up in the scandal sought to deflect blame to an unnamed third party. However on the final night, despite again being interrogated about the whole scandal and denying having an active role, eventually two couples confessed to being the active agents in the scandal. So throughout the season they had actively lied protect their own interests. Periodically during the season I recall seeing one of these couples using phrases like, “this is your truth” I remember thinking this is a dangerous concept, truth encompasses the concept of objectivity, “your truth” implies a significant measure of subjectivity and self-interest underlying their concept of “truth”. We all know that self-interest can be a powerful and deceptive motivator. During the pandemic we have seen great acts of selflessness but sadly also serious acts of selfishness. We have seen the truth manipulated by politicians, the media and individuals and groups within our society. We have seen indicators that significant amounts of this manipulative behaviour has been motivated by self-interest, ambition and a craving for power and notoriety.

The gospel passage we read today takes us into the heart of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. It features in the readings today because of its frequent references to Jesus’ Kingship. Kingship and Kingdom language is often challenging in our age. It often conjures ideas of oppression, abuses of power, domination, colonialism and exploitation. This has provoked strong moves to eliminate these images from our music in worship.

Our readings today seek to highlight that Jesus Kingdom and Jesus rule, is vastly different to that which may be experienced currently, and historically, through ruling monarchs in our world. Pilate struggled with this concept. He ridiculed the thought that Jesus could be a King, as he did not fit the image of a first Century monarch or Ruler. Jesus also casts a shadow over Pilate’s authority when he says, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above”[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus followers also struggled with the concept. Earlier in this gospel, after the feeding of the multitude, Jesus comments that “they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, [so] he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Jesus followers failed to see how there could be a different kind of “kingdom” other than the political military kingdoms in which they had lived.

Jesus seeks to stress the different nature of his kingship. Jesus said, “My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No, my kingdom does not belong here!”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Jesus kingdom is very different to an earthly kingdom. The Good News translation is not completely accurate in this verse. The end phrase should read more like “my kingdom does not originate from here”; “does not belong here” sounds like Jesus is talking about his kingdom as “other-worldly” esoteric, spiritual, intangible and not designed for our earth. However Jesus also said to his followers that “the kingdom of God is among you”[[4]](#footnote-4) and taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus death, resurrection, ascension and exultation inaugurated God’s kingdom here on earth. However, we know that this is not a fully realised experience, there is a sense in which we continue to wait for God’s kingdom, God’s rule to be operating fully in our world. We are said to be living in the “in between” times. As followers of Jesus we live under the rule of God in Jesus Christ, yet we also wait for God’s rule to be seen and acknowledged by all. God’s kingdom is tangible, practical and is designed to permeate our world. Jesus paints many pictures of what God’s kingdom is like. Though we may struggle to fully comprehend the kingdom of God, we can be encouraged that Jesus said that we are to enter God’s kingdom like little children, children who accept and trust in the love of God offered to us in Jesus.

The kingdom rule of God does not originate in demonstrations of human power, it doesn’t come from Rome or Jerusalem, it comes from God, from the presence of God. It is of divine origin and ownership. It’s allegiance is not to any human power but to God. It affirms God as supreme authority, ruling over all, reigning over this world. God’s kingdom cannot be manufactured on earth, but we pray that God’s kingdom will come on earth as in heaven, it originates in God and comes to earth from God. Ramsey Michaels describes it this way, “It is nothing less than Jesus all-encompassing “authority over all flesh”, and in the end it will supersede all human authority. Pilate in the end will pronounce it politically harmless, but it is more dangerous than he imagines.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Jesus authority is based in truth. His rule is based in the reality that he embodies truth. The one you can trust unequivocally is the one who is completely truthful, who embodies truth. Jesus puts great emphasis on his role in testifying to the truth. His God given royal authority enables him to testify to the truth, to reveal God to humanity.

Pilate’s conversation with the Jews goes on into the next chapter. He tries on numerous occasions to release Jesus.[[6]](#footnote-6) He does not see Jesus as a threat. Pilate is well known for scorning his Jewish subjects.[[7]](#footnote-7) In one of his conversations with the Jews he refers to Jesus as their king and the Chief Priests reply, “The only king we have is the Emperor!” In rejecting Jesus as King, and saying they “have no king but Caesar”[[8]](#footnote-8) they reject God as their King also. Such a statement compromises their obedience to the commandments to love and honour God alone.

So what is at the heart of the image of Jesus kingly rule for us today? Like Pilate and Jesus first followers, we are called to recognise that Jesus rule on earth originates in God’s plan for our world. It points to the reality of the ongoing activity of God in our world. It reminds us that the world in which we live intersects with God, the source of all life. Our communities also would benefit from reminders of how we see God at work in the world today. Part of our sharing of our faith with others encompasses those ways in which we see God at work in the ordinary affairs of daily life.

This special day in the liturgical year was inaugurated in 1925 when Pope Pius wanted to address concerns regarding the ideologies that were permeating the community. This Sunday gave an opportunity to emphasise the reality that God is active in human affairs and this is one aspect of the rule or reign or Kingship of God in Christ. Likewise today our world is flooded with various ideologies, as followers of Jesus we are called to be lights in the world, lights which point to our living and active God.

Jesus pointed to his call to testify to the truth, and Jesus lived out the truth, so likewise we also bear that call as followers of Christ. It may be a good time to consider how we are going in living out and sharing the truth of Jesus through what we say and how we live.

1. John 19:11 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 6:15 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 18:36 Good News Translation [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 17:21b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. J. Ramsay Michaels, *The Gospel of John,* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2010) 923 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. John 19:4, 6, 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gail R. O’Day, “The gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander. E. Keck et al, (Ed) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 815 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. John 19:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)