

John 18:33-37

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."

Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"*

What is Truth? - November 21, 2021

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There are over seven billion people on this earth and the number increases every day. In the course of our lifetimes, we will never meet even the tiniest fraction of them. Even among the few hundred people we may know by name in our lives, we can't even say that we know them well.

How well, for example, do you know your parents? Do you understand after knowing and thinking about them for perhaps decades, what makes them tick? Do you understand their ideas, their motivations, the reasons behind their choices? Besides being Mom and Dad, how much do you really know about them? What is the truth of their lives?

What about your life partner? Even after living together and enduring bad times and enjoying good times for years, how much can you say you know about them? In the course of years of life together, how many times have you sat down for a real heart-to-heart talk? For most of the time, we are content to be roughly "on the same page" as our partners, each pursuing our own interests, work, and activities and not really dealing with major issues until circumstances force us to.

If that is the relationship with our parents and partners, how about our relationships with our friends, co-workers, or children? Sure, we might hang out together, visit each other's homes sometimes, enjoy a drink or two, but how much do we really know about people we may see many days in the month? Perhaps you are like me in having some friends whom you haven't seen in years or even communicated with, but even after time and distance can resume a conversation or relationship as if it were only yesterday.

I talk about how well we know, or don't know our families and friends not to make anyone feel guilty or bad about not knowing but simply to point out that the only people we may know in life, at least somewhat well, are ourselves. And I will say that none of us can claim to understand even ourselves very well. The field of Psychology exists to help us understand ourselves better and with that better understanding, enable us to possibly make better decisions about our lives. However, regardless of psychologists, the most we can hope for in terms of self understanding is to be able to maybe know a bit more about ourselves as we grow mentally and spiritually. We will never know everything about ourselves, ever.

I start today with this discussion of self-knowledge because it is directly related to the question Pontius Pilate asked Jesus during his trial, "What is Truth?"

Recall that during the process of the religious authorities arresting and prosecuting Jesus for preaching a new way of looking at life and at God, they had to have his execution authorized by the Roman government, which was represented by the Governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate's job was to determine whether Jesus had committed any crime that broke Roman law to the extent he deserved to die. After questioning Jesus, Pilate was ready to let Jesus go. They concluded their exchange with Jesus claiming he was the source of truth and Pilate asking Jesus what truth really is, anyway.

And that, friends, is the fundamental question not just for Pilate, but for us all. There are over seven billion human beings on this earth and that means there are over seven billion individual journeys that are being taken through this journey called life. No two journeys are the same. Every one of us has been affected by millions of factors beyond our control. Who our parents are, where we were raised, whether we had money, how our bodies and health are, what education we received, the other people influential in our lives. These are just a few of the things that have made our individual lives different from each other.

It therefore means that Pilate is correct in asking what truth is because there are over seven billion different human versions of truth in the world right now. Each of us looks at the world differently from each other. Of course, our ways may be similar, but they will never be exactly the same. Pilate is stating that Truth is subjective. We all have differing ideas and proving that one person's human truth is somehow superior to another's version is a difficult proposition indeed.

Nevertheless, Jesus states that he is Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus states that no one can come to God except through him. That is quite a claim, isn't it? What is so special about Jesus' Truth that he can assert that his Truth is in fact superior to all seven billion plus versions of truth existing on the world today?

And that, friends, is what this Sunday, "Christ the King" or "Reign of Christ" Sunday asks us. Is Christ Jesus our King? Do we, can we, will we acknowledge that his Truth about God and the world is in fact definitive, definitive to the point where we will actively seek to conform our lives and our thinking to his?

Because that, friends, is what this Christian stuff is really about. Your being here in church is a kind of personal confession that you believe your ideas about life and living are somehow incomplete. To be a Christian is to be willing to say to the world: "Yes, I have my own life path, and my own life experiences, and have been influenced in all kinds of ways to be the person I am right now. However, I have concluded that I need something more. I need something better. I need an anchor on which to ground my life and actions."

Jesus Christ asserts that He and He alone is that anchor. He is that Truth human beings need to make sense out of their life journey.

Here is the challenge of life neatly summarized by Pilate: What Is Truth? In the purely human world, there is no truth at all. There are simply seven billion individual truths. You have a truth and I have a truth about life and living. How can we possibly differentiate between them? On what basis can I claim my life's choices are superior to yours? I can certainly tell you about my world view and my ideas and how I believe they affect my life choices. Similarly, you can tell me about your world view and your ideas and how they affect you.

However, when it comes to making you or forcing you to change your ideas to conform with mine or you making me change by ideas to conform with yours, what right do either of us have to make each other conform to anything. What is so special about you that should make me live my life your way? What is so special about me that would require you to live your life my way?

And yes the real truth is, the truth believed by Pontius Pilate is meaningless. As one human being to another, we are equal. I have no right to force you to believe as I do and you have no right to force me to believe as you do. As human beings, we simply are fellow travelers on this planet going through life with our

own individual assumptions and values. If they happen to be in agreement, great. And if they happen to be in conflict with each other, also great. I am me and you are you, so be it.

I realize that my message today may be sounding rather deep and complex. I hope I haven't lost you. However, on this Reign of Christ Sunday, we need to reflect on what Jesus Christ is about, for our world and for ourselves as individuals. After all, next week, we relaunch our Christian journey with the first Sunday of Advent — preparing for Jesus to enter the world on the day we call Christmas. However, if we don't understand and appreciate the significance of Jesus, what he means for us individually and for the world, then really, what is the point of Advent and Christmas except to party, visit, and exchange gifts? Around the world, billions of people celebrate Christmas — people who have never set foot inside a church and haven't the faintest clue about who Jesus is. And to be sure friends, millions of those people live right here in the USA.

So what is so special about Jesus? What gives him the right, the authority, the sheer chutzpah, to claim His Way is The Way, His Truth is The Truth, and His Life should be the model for our lives? How is Jesus' truth superior to our own and indeed should replace our human truth altogether?

Let us start by asking, how do you make decisions in your life, both big and small? You may decide by thinking that you'll simply do what you've always done. You may ask someone or go online to research. In short, rather than think for yourself, which can be hard, going along with the crowd is much easier. Indeed, no human being has the time or ability to think actively about every decision we make and every action we take. We all do hundreds of things every day. Recall that when we drive our cars, most of what we do, steering, braking, checking the mirrors, is most automatic. No real thought is involved. We reserve our thinking for unusual situations. We focus on the car pulling ahead of us or the ambulance flashing its lights.

Life is like driving, isn't it? We do the "same old, same old" because it's easy to do. We listen to friends, family, and leaders because we're used to doing that. It's easy and gives us time to think about more important things. So far, so good.

But, what happens when the "same old, same old" doesn't work? What happens with the ideas of friends, family, and leaders don't work? What happens when the ideas and actions we have been taking in life simply don't square with what we are seeing and hearing? What happens when what worked before doesn't work any more? What happens when the things that used to make us happy don't make us happy anymore? What happens when we do what we've always done but now it doesn't work anymore?

The truth is, as Thomas Jefferson put it in the Declaration of Independence, is that, "that [people] are more disposed to suffer, . . . than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed." In other words, even when the old ways aren't working, we will generally suffer with the old ways than do the harder work of thinking about new ways of life and living.

Jesus, friends, is not just another nice guy filled with wisdom. While many place him in the same category as Socrates, or Buddha, or Confucius, or other wise people, he is not. Obviously the ideas that Jesus proclaimed in his ministry overlap with the those other wise people have also taught. Jesus' emphasis on

love is hardly unique to the Christian faith. Most great religious teachers have concluded and shared the insight that if we human beings do not do our best to love each other, then we will destroy each other.

So what is so special about Jesus? What truth does he bring that should make us want to substitute his Truth for our own? Because that, friends is exactly what the Christian Faith asks of us. To worship God in Jesus Christ means that we have decided that Jesus' Way must be our way. Jesus' Truth must be our truth. And Jesus' life must be our model for living. Over time, we will rely less and less on our own ideas and experiences and replace them with those of Jesus. In short, we will devote our lives to replacing our truths with His Truth.

But why? Why should we defer to Jesus Christ? What is it about his message that we should accept it and follow him instead of our own ideas and experiences? Because I say so? Because the Church says so? Because the Bible tells be so?

Let us be clear, as the great Christian "explainer" C.S. Lewis put it, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool; you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us." Lewis reminds us, "Jesus was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects - Hatred - Terror - Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild admiration."

In other words, Jesus is so different from the world, his ideas and approach to life so unique that Jesus forces all of us to make a choice about his claim of being the Truth. Week after week, you come here to listen to stories about Jesus and how God works in the world. Preachers try to demonstrate how different what God wants and how God in Jesus Christ works is not how the world works.

In sum, Jesus Christ is not about making a few modifications to how you are living your life right now. He is not about tweaking a thing or two. As Lewis said, "Christianity does not involve the belief that all things were made for [human beings]. it does involve the belief that god loves [us] and for his sake became a man and died." No one else, no other philosophy or belief system makes such a claim. In that way, Jesus is correct in asserting His is the Truth because there is no other Truth in the world that comes even close to comparing with His. In short, there are only two ways of looking at the world: the human way or Jesus' way. When you really compare the two, you'll find that they are opposite and there is nothing in between.

We call this day "Reign of Christ" Sunday to remind us all that if Jesus is truly in charge of our lives, we spend our time on earth conforming to him. Period.

In return, Jesus promises and delivers us a life here and now that is far better and far more satisfying than anything we can ever imagine on our own. And that, friends, is why for me Jesus Christ is my Truth.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.