

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, November 24, 2024
"Reign of Christ"

Young at Heart Message

Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, also known as Christ the King Sunday.

Pastors don't like to admit this, but this Sunday is often one that pastors would prefer to avoid.

Reign of Christ Sunday was established in 1925. So, next year will be the 100th anniversary of this celebration in the church year.

Pastors like to avoid this Sunday, and often we will ignore it and talk about something else, because we don't always really know how to handle it.

It also falls right before Advent, and often people miss this Sunday anyway, so I think a lot of pastors figure no one will notice if we skip it.

But, I think it's worth talking about, so bear with me today.

I want to begin with what I hope will be a fun exercise for us.

I want to compile a list together of all the ways we might describe a king.

Since I'm guessing few, if any, of us personally know a king, we will need to draw on what we know from history, any current knowledge of monarchs, and, we will need to draw a lot from popular culture – movies, TV, books, etc.

So, let's make a list together. It's OK to be a little silly here, or to put something on the list that you've seen in movies or on TV.

Our AV folks are going to type our list into the next few slides for us so we can see it.

I'll get us started by adding two things to the list:

Kings **lead battles**.

Kings are **rich**.

Now, let's ask our AV folks to get ready to type into our next slide, and then you all add your own ideas to our list.

Description of a King

- Lead battles
- Rich
- Respected
- Lots of red clothes
- Majestic
- Crown
- Rulers
- Trustworthy
- Privileged
- Lead people
- Knowledgeable
- Well Known but not popular
- Strong
- Feared
- Controlling
- Regal
- Tax people
- Kind

Now that we have our list of words that might describe a king, I'd like to make another list of words that describe what we know about Jesus.

Again, I'll get us started:

Jesus is **compassionate**.

Jesus is **selfless**.

Once again, please add your own ideas to this list and our AV folks will type as we go.

Description of Jesus

- Compassionate
- Selfless
- Loving
- Humble
- Caring
- Angry
- Healing
- Kind
- Leader
- THoughtful
- Patient
- No fancy clothes
- No palace
- Wasn't privileged
- Teacher
- Empathetic
- Served the people
- Didn't make the rules
- No taxes
- forgiving

Description of Jesus

- Crown of thorns
- Healer
- Served god
- Showed Different way of living
- Not jealous
- Filled with faith

All right, let's have the AV team pull up our description of kings so we can review it quickly.

Now, let's pull up our description of Jesus.

How similar or different are these lists?

Does Jesus fit the traditional description of a king?

The Message

It doesn't seem like Jesus in any way fits the traditional mold of a king, and yet he is referred to as a king throughout the Gospels, and especially in the Gospel of John.

Today's scripture passage, at first glance, doesn't seem to fit with where we are in the church year because it's a scene with Pontius Pilate after Jesus has been arrested.

Typically, we would read these scenes during Lent as we lead up to Jesus's death and resurrection.

But, we see it here because of the Gospel of John's focus on Christ as King.

Pilate asks Jesus very directly if Jesus is the king of the Jews.

Jesus, however, does not directly answer the question at all.

All he seems to do is frustrate Pilate further by asking Pilate if he's asking this on his own or if someone told Pilate about Jesus.

Pilate gets a bit snappy with Jesus and tells him that his *own* people brought Jesus to him. Pilate, I'm sure, would prefer a sleepy day in the office over dealing with this noise.

So Pilate asks Jesus what he has done, and Jesus responds by saying “my kingdom doesn’t belong to this world.”

Pilate takes his response as affirming that Jesus is admitting to being a king.

Jesus then says, “*You* are the one saying I’m a king, not me. *I* came here to bear witness to the truth.”

In other words, Jesus is implying that our human definitions of kingship are not sufficient to describe Jesus.

Jesus is not a king in the traditional way that people throughout history have thought of kings.

Jesus says here “*you* are the one saying I’m a king” because he knows he isn’t a king in the way that people would traditionally define a king.

Jesus isn’t leading armies to battle, sitting on a golden throne, wearing a jewel-encrusted crown, or exploiting the labour of the people for his own benefit.

Jesus isn’t throwing balls and rubbing elbows with the rich and powerful members of society.

He’s not making money off the people.

Jesus isn’t dictating, making laws, or asserting his power over others.

If anything, Jesus lives to serve other people, not to be served.

So when he tells Pilate that “*you* are the one saying I’m a king,” he’s making sure Pilate and everyone else knows that even if that is the only word to describe him, he is a very different type of king than the kings they have ever known about.

Jesus is speaking to Pilate of a truth that Pilate does not understand.

He is pointing out the truth that Pilate proclaims, but does not act on.

And it begs the question, then: what truths do we proclaim as Christians but not act on?

Which rulers do we tend to follow? Whose reign do we *want* to guide our individual and communal lives?

The reality is that we live in a world full of flawed humans.

Each and every one of us are flawed, and all of our rulers, at every level of governance in every country on Earth, throughout history are also flawed.

And yet, throughout history, humans have elevated leaders to a status well beyond what they should be elevated to.

We elevate human leaders above all others, and we forget that only Jesus bears witness to the truth.

All other rulers throughout history are concerned with money, power, authority, and rule.

Jesus is concerned with the truth.

He isn't even concerned with establishing the truth.

He is concerned with *bearing witness* to the truth.

So, if we believe we are called to follow Jesus and his "reign" as king, then we must also believe that we are called to join him in bearing witness to the truth.

And, as we know, that is not always easy to do because, especially with technological advancements and the emergence of digital media at our fingertips, the truth has become harder and harder to discern.

We must, then, listen for the ways that Christ's truth and Christ's version of kingship does not align with the messages we may be receiving from the world.

How do we do that?

I have found that experience with real flesh-and-blood people is the best way to bear witness to the truth.

It is often only once we get to know someone who is different than we are that we start to learn that what the world tells us about that person is not necessarily the truth.

But we cannot determine truth unless we bear witness to it personally.

If we have only heard something from somewhere, we cannot be certain that it is the truth.

It is only through listening to other people's stories, trying to understand their perspective, and finding common ground that we can begin to bear witness to the actual truth.

So, as we elevate Christ to the status of King, may we remember that his kingship is so very different than the kingship we see here on Earth.

Christ's kingship *bears witness* to the truth, and Christ asks us to follow him in bearing witness to others.

So, may we listen to our neighbours. May we find common ground. May we hear their stories without judgement. And may we continue to love those around us as Jesus loves us and serves *us* as our king. Amen.

Let us pray: God of love, you have established Jesus Christ as sovereign of the world. Help us to renounce all other loyalties. O Gentle Christ, bless us that your love may rule over our lives. Fill us with the power of your grace and the authority of your mercy. Give us the humility to receive your gifts and the strength to serve you faithfully. Rule over us, that our lives may be in harmony with yours, by the gift of your Holy Spirit. Amen.