

John 18:33-38

Focus Statement: Claiming Jesus Christ as king means allowing ourselves to be claimed by Christ and placing following Christ our highest priority.

Function Statement: Listeners

History of Christ the King

It was the year 1925,
the Great World War had just ended,
and the pieces were beginning to move into place
to set the stage for World War 2.

Pope Pius the eleventh was serving as the Catholic Pope.

As one of a number of edicts

he instituted a new holy day in the church,
called the Feast of Christ the King.

This holiday would celebrate the absolute authority of Christ,
over all creation.

The kingship of Jesus Christ.

Pius created this holiday

as a response to the changing world around him.

He witnessed growing secularism,

with many people abandoning faith.

He witnessed increasing nationalism.

Fascism began rising up around Europe.

The leaders of these dictatorships demanded absolute obedience.

They tried to assert their authority over the church.

In this moment of history, the catholic Pope Pius
feared the potential impact of this growing nationalism.

He feared how it might impact the church.

He feared the challenge to Christ's authority.

He witnessed an attempted realignment
of the Christian moral compass
to suit worldly agendas.

An amazing this is that Pius' fear came true.

The most obvious example is that of the German Christian Church.
This denomination essentially became appropriated by the Nazis,
and recruited to assist in its anti-semitic genocide.

Into this moment, Pope Pius instituted the Feast of Christ the King.
Celebrated today, on the last day of the liturgical year,
before the beginning of Advent.

Purpose of Christ the King

Christ the King Sunday exists
to remind Christians that no authority on earth
can match the authority of Christ.

Though we live in this world,
we are not **of** this world.

Though we live in a society
and we are irresistibly part of that society,
we are beholden to a higher power.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Consider with me a story

many years before the beginning of Christ the King Sunday,
Many years before Jesus stood toe-to-toe with Pontius Pilate

Remember with me the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,
or as some of my youth used to call them,
Shadrach, Meshach, and Indigo.

That's not a mistake, they intentionally called him Indigo,
just to pick at me.

Their story takes place as the Israelites find themselves
conquered by the Babylonians.

Many of the Israelites have been taken to the city of Babylon,
where they live in exile for more than 70 years.

In this time span, they struggle to understand their identity,
and their place in this foreign world.

How should they live as God's chosen people,
in a foreign and "pagan" land?

Should they daily oppose those who have conquered them?

Should they accept their fate,
and let themselves be ruled by their conquerors?

What does faith to God look like in Babylon?

Enter Shadrach, Meshach, and **Abednego**,
three Israelites who find themselves,
in places of authority in Babylon.

The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, builds a golden statue,
and commands all the people to bow down and worship it.

But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse.

Though they have risen ranks in Babylon,

and work within the system that conquered them,
they refuse to bow before the King's statue.

They refuse to surrender to a worldly king their ultimate allegiance.

Nebuchadnezzar demands that they worship his god,
or be thrown into a furnace to die.

The three reply,

“If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us
from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand,
O king, let him deliver us.

But if not, be it known to you, O king,
that we will not serve your gods
and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.”

Though they called him king, they would not worship him
even though they knew it meant their death.

This dramatic story ends with the king calling their bluff
and casting them into a fiery furnace.

But, out of the fire, the men are saved by God.

Though they placed the trust in God,
these three faced the threat of death
rather than bow down before a king of this world.

Authority in this world

There are many powers in our world,
many modern forms of Babylon,
that vie for not only our attention,
but also our allegiance.

There are many people and powers

who claim a place of authority;
who demand our total allegiance.

They may not demand that we get down on our knees
in worship,
but, nonetheless, they demand that we give them total allegiance.
They demand that we offer them utmost reverence,
that we realign our moral compass with theirs.
These powers of the world challenge the power
the authority of Jesus.

Pilate with Jesus

In one of the final scenes before his crucifixion,
Jesus meets with one of the worldly powers
of his time, Pilate.

Pilate is a representative of Rome,
the Babylon of Jesus' day.

Pilate's goal is to figure out if Jesus has committed sedition.
He is tasked with discovering
if Jesus is claiming the authority that belongs to the empire.

Keep in mind, this is why Jesus was executed.
There are many reasons that he was captured,
Why he was condemned by the religious leadership.
But the Roman empire executed Jesus for the crime of treason,
They believed he claimed authority that belonged to them.
This is why Pilate asks:

“So you are a king?”

He tries to discern if Jesus is claiming the authority

that Rome has given to Herod Antipas,
the king of the Jews in Palestine.

Yet Jesus' authority exceeds that of **any** earthly king,
The answer to Pilates' question is both yes and no,
Jesus is a ruler, is a king, but not of any kingdom
that Pilate would recognize.

Jesus says,
My kingdom is not from this world,
if it was, my followers would be putting up much more of a fight,
My kingdom is not from here.

Pushing the issue further,
Jesus says his role as king is to testify to truth.
To be the voice that speaks truth to the world.

Pilate reveals his ineptitude when he asks,
What is truth?

Pilate asks this question,
because he does not know what truth is.

Pilate is of this world, a product of a human society.
The world offers only partial truths,
half truths, truths that satisfy and justify the people who claim them.

Jesus does not answer his question in Scripture,
because Jesus **is** the answer to his question.

Jesus Christ is the way, the **truth** and the life.

Jesus Christ, the living God,

not only preaches the truth, he **is** truth.

In all that he says, in all that he does,

he lives **God's** truth,
which contrasts to the world's truths.

The powers of this world speak of domination, and strength
Jesus is the truth of humility and weakness.

The powers of this world speak of security and of protections
and of borders, and walls, and boundaries.
Jesus is the truth of breached walls,
indestructible bridges,
and grace that knows no bounds.

The powers of this world speak of winning, and being number one
Jesus is the truth of being servant of all,
and being first by being last.

The powers of the world speak of fear and hatred of the other,
Jesus is the truth of love, love of God, love of neighbor,
love of enemy and love of stranger.

Christ First

The powers of this world want to be the authority
want to claim the positions of the first.

Team First, School First, Party First,
Family First, Company First, Brand First,
Nation First, even Church First,

Into this cacophony of firsts,
Christians claim Christ as King.
We proclaim, Christ First.

Reclaiming Jesus Movement

There is a movement of pastors, leaders, theologians,
that have witnessed the same threats arising today,
that arose when Pope Pius instituted the Feast of Christ the King.

The movement is called, “Reclaiming Jesus”
They have recognized a growing secularism,
mounting nationalism,
and a demand for allegiance to be placed in the powers of this
world.

In response to this growing threat to Christ’s authority and truth,
they have made many bold statements
aimed at American society.

I will not read all of them,
but they claim,

That the authorities of this world,
including that of our government
are instituted by God to order an unredeemed society
for the sake of justice and peace.

But ultimate authority belongs only to God.

They claim that, because Jesus tells us to make disciples of all nations,
and because God so loved the world that He sent his only Son,
we must love and serve the world and **all** its inhabitants,
rather than seek narrow, nationalistic motivations.

They reject white nationalism,
they reject misogyny
they reject any agenda that does not prioritize the poor,
They reclaim Jesus and **his** truth.

This Reclaiming Jesus movement seeks to remind Christians,
who we are
and to whom we owe allegiance.

We may find ourselves, like Shadrach, Meshach, and **Abednego**
in a foreign place, tempted to give allegiance to another power
to a modern Babylon,
but Babylon is not who we are.
Babylon's gods are not our God.

We may find ourselves under the influence of a Rome,
but Rome is not who we are
and Roman truth is not Jesus' truth.

The gospel of John gives voice to this important claim,
we may be in the world,
but we are not of the world.

Christ is our King,
not because he exploits us,
but because he empowers us.
not because he dominates us,
but because he has dominion over all things,
not because he shows his strength,
but because he claims victory in his weakness,
not because he demands worship,

but because he deserves it.

Because Jesus Christ is the truth, the way, the life.

May we offer our ultimate allegiance to that truth, way, and life.

May we live out Christ's call to love God and love neighbor.

May we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

And may we place our ultimate allegiance in Jesus Christ

our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.