November 18th – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Who Do You Say I Am?

I. Who’s On Trial?

This text from our Gospel reading this morning is often subtitled ‘The Trial on Jesus,’ but really, perhaps, the more appropriate title should be ‘The Trial on Pilate.’ Pilate is waffling, and you can tell in his distinct, intellectual questions that he wants a firm answer out of Jesus. Pilate wants Jesus to say, ‘Yes, I am King of the Jews’ – and then Pilate can go with a clear conscious and crucify him for this act. Yet Jesus isn’t giving any of this up, and Jesus is treating Pilate like he would anyone else – like a child of God.

Pilate has found himself in a pickle. To be honest, I almost feel bad for him, because he is in a position where he will never really be free. He has the pressure of the Jewish leaders against him, pushing him and pushing him, to get this guilty plea out of Jesus. If he doesn’t, how will this look for Pilate? How will Rome look upon Pilate’s leadership in Jerusalem? Pilate looks like he’s the man who has all the power and control in the world, but he is trapped.

For if he says, Yes, Jesus is King of the Jews and I believe him and will follow him – he might as well put his own cross on Calvary hill. He will be mocked, detained, and most likely crucified himself. If he goes down that road where he believes in Jesus’ divine power, he might save his soul, but he will give up his life.

And yet, on the other hand, and what ends up happening, is that Pilate does save his life, but doesn’t save his soul. I wonder what kind of guilt Pilate held after sending Jesus to the cross, because he knew, he knew that this man named Jesus had done nothing wrong. Was Pilate able to live with himself? What happened after that crucifixion day? What happened after the resurrection day? What ever happened to Pilate?

And you can tell in this to-and-fro trial that Pilate is again, just begging Jesus to give it up – to make Pilate’s job easier. Pilate even says to Jesus in the next passage, “I have the power to release you, and the power to crucify you. Do you know that?” Pilate even says that there is no case against Jesus – that Jesus isn’t a true threat, yet the powers of the Jewish leaders and the power of the political world push Pilate into saying, ‘Crucify him.’

II. Who do you say I am?

Within the confines of our passage this morning, Jesus’ grace continues to amaze me. He doesn’t rebel, he doesn’t get so frustrated at Pilate that he just goes off on him – no, Jesus has a gentle and pastoral conversation with Pilate. Jesus turns the tables on Pilate, but does it gently. While Pilate is trying to get an answer out of Jesus, Jesus looks to him and tries to essentially have this moment with Pilate, a child of God – Who do you say that I am? And Pilate says he isn’t a Jew, and he’s really asking about Jesus’ status because of the Jewish leaders. Yet Jesus wants to know who Pilate thinks he is – Jesus isn’t interested in the Jewish leaders right now, he’s having a one-on-one with Pilate here. Who do you say I am, Pilate? Who do you believe I am? You don’t have to be weighed down by this political pressure, you can listen to the truth, you can follow me. Pilate, I want to know who *you* think I am.

And Pilate can’t answer the question, because he is so struck down by fear. He is so fearful to be honest. If Pilate could ask his own questions – what would he ask Jesus? What if Pilate could recognize that he, even he, is a beloved child of God. What if Pilate could see that he belongs to God, no matter what choice he makes?

III. Are we honest?

So, you and I aren’t hampered down by the weight of political powers, but this Scripture easily invites the question. If Jesus were to ask you, right here, in the middle of Martins, in the middle of your workplace, in the middle of the school hallways, ‘Who am I?’ – would we have the bravery, the tenacity, the integrity to say, “You are King, You are Christ our Lord.” Do we live out our faith outside the safety of the sanctuary walls?

I recently heard a testimony from one of our local pastor’s that fits this Christ the King Sunday. She was telling me that she was working out in New Market and her kids were at a Christian school in Eldersburg. It was the morning of 9/11, and as all the parents were rushing to pick up their kids at school, she had to get herself from New Market back to Eldersburg in a rush. On the ride, she was fretting – most of the parents of the school were local, and here she was feeling like a bad mother because she couldn’t get there quick enough. She was listening to the radio reports, fear rising up in her, just wanting to see her children.

By the time she made it to Eldersburg to pick up her children, all of the other parents had picked up their children. The Principal stood next to her children and he was calm, assured. She apologized up and down, worried, feeling bad for taking so much time. And yet, the only words that the Principal drew from his lips were four strong words: “Christ is still King.”

Christ is still King. The powers of the world and terrorism might have been plaguing the U.S. and the world, it was chaotic, but this principal understood. He showed his faith in a profound way, he knew that this world and it’s leaders were not God, he knew that despite all that was happening around them in the chaos, “Christ is still King.”

IV. Can We Say That?

This is still a testimony I marvel at as we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. Would I have the tenacity, the assurance, the integrity, in difficult situations to say, “Christ is King.” I suppose I do, when I say that God is God and we are not. But, am I able to carry that out into my life? Are you able to carry that out into your life? What about those who hold significant powers in this world? Can one be in a position of power and still remain humble and honest?

There was a U.S. Senator, who wanted to declare that his vote to authorize the war in Iraq was wrong – he wanted to come clean. He wanted to be honest and say, “I was wrong here and I’m sorry.” And he made three drafts of an op-ed piece where he confessed, but his aides stepped in and tempered the op-ed piece to say that he was ‘misled.’ The aides believe, that if the Senator was honest and authentic, he would lose his power. They would lose their jobs. Honesty was not a risk that they were willing to take.

Again, we aren’t in the political sphere, but it’s still worth the question – do we have the freedom in our own lives to be truly honest? Are we free to live authentically? Do we hide parts of ourselves to appear like we are in control?

This Sunday, we proclaim, aloud in this sanctuary, “Christ is King.” The challenge as you go from this place is that you move those words and the belief you have from these sanctuary walls into your own daily lives. The challenge is to live authentically, as a child of Christ, acknowledging Him as King and Lord of All, and living with integrity, tenacity, and honesty in a world that so desperately needs to know that they and we all belong to God. Amen.