

*Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”*

<sup>34</sup> *“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”*

<sup>35</sup> *“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”*

<sup>36</sup> *Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*

<sup>37</sup> *“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.*

*Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:33-37)*

### **Here Is Your King**

Crowds went ahead of him. Crowds follow him. Cloaks and robes are set on the dusty ground. Palm branches wave in the air while people call out: “Hosanna” It’s both a word of praise and prayer: God save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The Messiah—God’s Chosen One—the Son of David enters Jerusalem. Here’s the King!

Jump ahead 2000 years to today and we see that. But if you were in the streets of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, I don’t know how kingly Jesus really looked. Instead of a powerful war-horse and stallion, Jesus rides a beast of burden, a donkey. For those familiar with Old Testament, they saw the connection to the kings of old. At the same time, compared to the powerful leaders of their day, it’s humble. Lowly. He wasn’t a tough politician or part of the ruling council. He was a Rabbi, a teacher. When we think of a king, we think of power, authority. He has a throne and castle with a kingdom over which he rules. He has people who he leads and protects from danger and disaster and they in turn serve and love him. A king looks like a king with a crown and robe that has a special aura that demands respect. You don’t question the king; you listen to him. His word is law. Often enough he’s above the law. He’s not open for suggestions or tolerating criticism; he knows what is best for his people. A good king will do it also. At least, that’s what we expect from a king.

I’m sure Pilate has his own ideas of what makes a king too. Then he sees Jesus. Pilate wasn’t some naïve foolish guy. You don’t get into his position if that was the case. He knows the Jewish leaders. He knows they are envious of Jesus. He knows that they want Jesus dead. He also knows a political bombshell that could ruin his

career when he sees one. As Pilate enters into the palace in the early hours of that Friday morning he puts Jesus to the question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” That’s the accusation brought against him. This is why Jesus is supposed to be put to death by the Romans—Jesus is a danger to the Roman Empire! But Pilate sees Jesus. Still, his curiosity is piqued. In Pilate’s eyes I’m sure all he sees is just another ordinary looking Jewish man, mid-thirties, whose face really wouldn’t stick out in a crowd. Maybe he heard rumors about a guy who did miracles and stuff. Maybe Pilate had heard talk about a ruckus going on a few days ago on Sunday about a Messiah Son of someone who comes in the name of the Jewish people’s God. Even then, this can’t be that guy, can it? Then again, who knows how much actually reached Pilate’s ears or that he cared. Then there’s this guy and the accusation. He’s clearly been forced to stay awake all night, beaten, slapped, bruised, dried spit on him and abused. This guy who is tied up and bound being handed over to the hated Romans by his own people to be killed, **“Are you, Jesus, really the king of the Jews?”**

In certain ways we might find ourselves asking a similar question. Are you the king, Jesus? Because if you are, why do you allow accidents to happen that kill people we love? Why don’t you zap out that cancer, that sickness, why do allow her to continue to suffer? Why do you allow minds to be betrayed with depression and anxiety and all sorts of mental illnesses? Why don’t you do something so that she sees what she is doing is wrong and hurting her?

Are you the king? If you are the king, why don’t set up policies so that I can be more financially stable? Why don’t you pass some regulations so that those who work hard are justly rewarded while, at the same time, you take care of the impoverished, the victims, and the marginalized in society?

If you are king, then why do you let the wicked prosper while your people suffer? Why do you allow persecution of your people to continue? Why do you seem to sit back and do nothing as so many mock and ridicule you? Why don’t do something so that your church is more successful and thriving?

Are you the king? Jesus answers Pilate’s question with one of his own, **“Is this your own idea or did others talk to you about me?”** “Are you asking this for your own benefit, Pilate, or are you asking because this is the accusation against me?”

Pilate can’t believe Jesus! Pilate responds, **“Am I a Jew?”** In other words, Pilate doesn’t care about rumors of a Messiah who has come for Israel or what that means. **“Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”** (v.35). Pilate wants to get to the bottom of this. What is the truth, Jesus? To which Jesus says, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my**

**servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place” (v.36).**

That’s the problem for the Jews, for Pilate, and for us. The Jews expected Jesus to be a king who would bring back the glory days of David. They would put down the Romans and Jesus would provide them with all the food they need or want like when he fed over 5000 people. Pilate expected Jesus to be a king with a plot of land for his kingdom with servants and armies to serve and adore him.

What are you expecting from the King? It seems we want him to set up a little paradise on earth for us where he takes away all suffering, pain, and sadness here—if not all, at least most. We want him to be a king who will listen to us, my ideas and my plans more than his own. We want him to be a king that we can openly criticize and willingly neglect while demanding that he comes to my call when it’s convenient for me. We want a paradise where we can twist the king’s word to fit our own agendas while getting rid of the difficult decisions and cross-bearing he calls us to carry. We want a kingdom where Christianity rules and we fight for our rights and freedoms. Yes, we are the church militant, but our battle is not against flesh and blood. How quickly we can get wrapped up in the false idea that the job of the church is to make better citizens, good people, and fix society’s problems. Jesus couldn’t be clearer. His kingdom is not of this world. Therefore, his kingdom is not going to look like the other kingdoms of this world. He’s not here to make paradise on earth. And still we find ourselves leaning on our own understanding, trusting in our own knowledge of what to expect, and loving what we think is best for us.

At this point, Pilate thinks he has Jesus: **“You are a king then!”** Jesus answers, **“You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”** (v.37).

Are we any better than Pilate as we sit here and question the King’s will and His plan? Are we any better than the Jewish leaders who hand Jesus over to be crucified? Are we any better than the soldiers who mock him and nail him to the cross? Are we any better than the man whose death sentence was moved to a life sentence without parole? Are we better than her who has made some bad choices and made a mess of her life? Are we any better than anyone who is not sitting here today? God forgive us for when act like it. After all, it was for your sins that Jesus is pierced by those nails. It was for your lack of trust and criticizing that he was crushed. It was for you that Jesus is punished.

But that’s why he was born! That’s the reason he is here! While we were still sinners, Christ was born to testify to the truth that God loves you despite your sins.

He was born to take your place so that you have peace with God and he fights on your side. Jesus was born to die! But you didn't force him to; you never would have asked him to. No one made Jesus go to that cross. He chose to do it so that you might have God's love. You didn't deserve it. You can't earn it. That's grace. Your King gives up his life to pay the ransom of your soul. Your King dies on the cross to crush your greatest enemy the devil. Your King laid down his life only to pick it back up again. He is the firstborn of the dead. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Your King lives.

All this Jesus did to testify to the truth that He is true God from eternity, your Lord and your King. And that flesh and blood, living King sits at the right hand of God's throne controlling all things for your good. Nothing is surprising him. He knows what you are dealing with and the struggles you face. He shared in our weaknesses and was tempted just like we are. He's got this. He's your king who wants you to be with him—look at what he has already done for you with living, dying, and rising. And then to make it your own the Ancient of Days steps into time and space to wash you with water and the Word in baptism to bring you into his kingdom and make you an heir of eternal life with him. Your king invites you to a special meal where he gathers all of his people and we who are many partake of the one loaf Jesus. There at the Lord's Supper your King feeds your faith and you receive his body and blood given and poured for you with the bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. And this King will come again. His kingdom is not of this world. He's returned to the Father to prepare a place for you. That means he is going to continue to work so that you might be his own and live in that kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Until then, we wait. As we start this season of Advent and another church year remember, this is why Jesus is here. This is why Jesus came into this world. This is why he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, stands in front of Pilate, goes to a cross and rises again. Not to set up a kingdom here, but to bring you into his own. This is the reason why we have a church. It's here where Jesus comes to us in Word and Sacrament to keep our eyes looking ahead to when he will come again. It's here where you hear your King's voice encouraging our troubled hearts. It's here we receive the peace that surpasses understanding. And from here we go sharing the peace that sins are forgiven in Jesus' name and the Good News: our King is coming soon. Amen.