

Old Testament: Daniel 7: 9 - 10 & 13 - 14  
New Testament: John 18: 33 - 38a

Please join me in prayer. And now Lord God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It's Christ the King Sunday and Thanksgiving is on Thursday. I'm supposed to talk about, on the one hand, the kingship, the lordship of Jesus Christ. And on the other hand, gratitude and thankfulness. How am I going to wombo-combo this and put these two together? Let's start here. I am thankful that I am not Pilate.

Did you catch how our reading from John ended? That last little comment from Pilate. Jesus refuses to answer Pilate's direct question to him, "are you the king of the Jews?". Instead, Jesus asks him a question in response to Pilate's question. Essentially, did you come up with this question yourself or did someone put you up to it? This right here is the first reason I am thankful that I am not Pilate. Having finally found, after many years without it, enough self-awareness and self-worth to speak for myself, and not have others put words in my mouth, is a profoundly freeing thing. To be beholden to no one or no thing besides God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is freedom indeed. Pilate clearly found himself between a rock and a hard place precisely because he was not free. He had a growing riot on his hands that if he didn't quell then the Roman garrison would and Pilate would likely be dead right alongside the rioters. There's no freedom in that. There's doing everything in your limited power to hold to power that is only fleeting and temporary to begin with. I am thankful that I am not Pilate.

Pilate clearly does not like how Jesus calls him out on having been put up to ask the "are you the king of the Jews" question. He's indignant as he blusters out his response, "Am I a Jew?" He's desperately trying to make this whole scenario about Jesus again and not himself; he's trying to blame shift and in doing so, not practicing self-awareness. His retort? Listen pal, your entire nation turned *you* over to *me*! Just what have you done anyways? Once again, Jesus refuses to answer the question instead talking about how his kingdom, the kingdom that he is a part of, is not of this world. And here is the second reason that I am thankful that I am not Pilate. Jesus calls the kingdom "my kingdom". Pilate hears that and seems to believe that that might be a self-indictment of Jesus' kingship. "So you are a king?", is his response. Except that my kingdom is not of this world either. Does that make me king of it? The United States of America is my country. Does that make me king of it? The state of Nebraska is my state. Does that make me king of it? The reason Pilate is so baffled by his interaction with Jesus is that he can only seem to hear and deal with

things in absolutes. You're either king or you're not. You're either for something or against it. You're either a liberal or you're not. You're either a conservative or you're not. I am so thankful that I am not Pilate and that I don't have to live my life in arbitrary boundaries set by other people. This again shows just how not free Pilate was. We tend to falsely believe that wealth, status, fame, prestige, status brings us more freedom. And this is not new to the human condition as clearly, Pilate was dealing with this as well. Jesus said something about his kingdom. He must be a king. I'm already beholden to another king (Caesar) so let's get rid of this king so I don't make the other king mad. That doesn't sound very free to me. I am thankful that I am not Pilate.

Jesus' response to being called a king? That's what *you* say. Then Jesus has his drop the mic moment. Here's why I was born. Here's why I came into the world. To bear witness to, to testify to, the truth. And beyond that, everyone who is of the truth listens to *my* voice. Mic drop. Surely, Pilate's head is spinning at this moment in time. He's got a multitude of things competing to be the truth. Caesar. The Roman Empire. His governorship and "power". The growing Jewish riot stirred up by the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Roman insurrectionists that he has to keep crucifying along the roadsides as testimony to the Roman "peace". This brings me my third and final reason that I am thankful that I am not Pilate. We know that Jesus truly had a mic drop moment because, with all of what we just discussed swirling around his head, all Pilate can manage to get out is, "what is truth?". Apparently, the year 30 in Roman occupied Israel is not so different from the year 2024 in the United States of America. So called "alternative facts" has entered into our vocabulary and lexicon. Despite our rabid desire to believe otherwise, might still does make right. There is some accountability that does occur but it occurs inequitably. Children, especially our young girls, are regularly exposed to false and unrealistic beauty standards because of filters across all the social media apps that people use. It's no wonder that so many people across this nation ask the same question that Pilate asks; "what is truth?" But I don't. I am thankful that I am not Pilate because I do not have to ask, "what is truth?" I don't have to ask "what is truth?" because I know *who* is truth. I deny, I reject, that the confusion of Pilate, the confusion of so many in our country, is king. I deny, I reject that confusion reigns. Christ reigns. Jesus is king. When "alternative facts" pass away; when might making right passes away; when inequity passes away; when false standards and social media passes away; Christ endures. When the United States of America passes away; Christ endures. Earthly kingdoms, earthly countries come and go; wax and wane. The kingdom of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, endures forever. I am *so* thankful that I am not Pilate because I do not have to ask "what is truth?" I know exactly who truth is and he is my king. Amen.