

**Sermon, “Reign of Christ”**

**Sunday, November 21, 2021**

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### **Name & Pronoun Pins**

#### **My Personal Growing Edge**

I’m (very slowly, but hopefully surely) learning to catch and resist my habit to reflexively identify other people according to MY perspective and experience, and to respect the capacity and the RIGHT of other people to know and name their own, true, authentic identities for themselves.

#### **Irony of celebrating “The Feast of Christ the King” Today**

Don’t misunderstand me...I’m not suggesting we just unceremoniously toss out 2,000 years of Christian history, or even hundreds of years of Church tradition, and hymnody. (I’ve been humming “Crown Him with Many Crowns” for at least the past 6 weeks).

I’m only suggesting that we be honest--and curious---about our persistence in calling Christ the King when “King” is not a term Jesus EVER ONCE uses to refer to himself. Not even in today’s Gospel---which is the Gospel reading *appointed* for the Sunday of Christ the King!

#### **In Today’s Gospel we read: (John 18:33-37)**

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “**Are you the King of the Jews?**” Jesus answered, “**Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?**” [Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”] Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”] Pilate asked him, “**So you are a king?**” Jesus answered, “**You say that I am a king.**

**For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, [not to be King, but] to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”**

(P.S. No offense - it seems like, in this conversation, Pilate is *not* listening to Jesus’ voice...)

### **TITLES**

It’s not like Pilate, or the first audience of John’s Gospel, or the early Church didn’t have a wealth of material to work with, when it came to understanding or naming Jesus in an authentic way. It isn’t like “King” was their only option. And it isn’t even like Jesus rejects EVERY title his followers or adversaries propose. On the contrary, In the Gospel of John, Jesus DOES accept several of the titles with which people attempt to label him.

(At the Last Supper, Jesus says to the disciples) You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. (13:13)

(On the night of his arrest in the Garden, when the soldiers come seeking Jesus of Nazareth), Jesus says “I AM he” (18:5)

Son of Man (man born blind; 9:37); Messiah (Woman @ Well 4:26)

Jesus identifies with a variety of titles: Jesus of Nazareth, Teacher, Lord, Son of Man, Messiah, but never once “King”.

In fact, according to John’s Gospel, “King” is a role Jesus explicitly tries to AVOID.

In the 6th Chapter of John, after Jesus has fed the multitudes he escapes to the mountain, alone, because he perceives that the people **“were about to come and take him by force to make him king”**.

When Jesus’ disciples catch up with him the following day, he tries to explain who he REALLY is to them once more--this time, in terms of a metaphor---

**I am the bread of life.** (6:35) he says, and:

**I am the living bread that came down from heaven** (6:51)

## METAPHORS

Bread isn’t the only metaphor Jesus employs as he strives to help his disciples understand who he is and what he’s about.

‘I am the light of the world (8:12)

I am the gate for the sheep. (10:7)

‘I am the good shepherd. (10:11)

‘I am the true vine. (15:1)

‘I am the resurrection and the life (11:24)

‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. (14:6)

In the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies with a variety of metaphors: Bread, Light, Gate, Shepherd, Vine, Resurrection, Life, Truth, the Way...but never once “King”

## FAMILIAR TITLES, METAPHORS, RELATIONSHIPS

I am in the Father and the Father is in me (10:38, 14:11)

I am not alone because the Father is with me. (16:32)  
I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (14:20)

## **ORIGIN & DESTINY**

I AM from Him who sent me (7:29) I am from above. (8:23)  
I am in the world... (9:5) I am here (8:42)  
I AM going to Him who sent me (7:33)  
'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you (14:18)

## **REFLECTING ON SELF IDENTITY**

I wonder... if you were to define yourself, not with your name and pronouns, but with a **Culturally Familiar Title**, what Title would you use? What **Metaphors**? If you were to define yourself in terms of **relationships**, what would they be? Or if you were to define yourself in terms of your **origin and your destiny**--where you've come from and where you're headed? What would you Say?

Jesus says:

I AM Jesus of Nazareth, Your Teacher & Lord, the Son of Man, the Messiah  
I AM Bread, Light, Gate, Shepherd, Vine, Resurrection, Life, Truth, the Way  
I AM In the Father and I AM in you  
I AM From above  
I AM In the world  
I AM Returning to the Father  
I AM Coming to You

And Pilate says:

**"So you are a king?"**

(Big Sigh & Eye roll) Jesus says, "You say that I am a King." (OK. Fine. Whatever you say.)

We can poke fun at Pilate all we want, but honestly:

How do our own imaginative limits, our preconceived notions, and values, and categories and assumptions get in the way of our ability to understand and be in right relationship with **ONE ANOTHER**?

How do our own imaginative limits, our preconceived notions, and values, and categories and assumptions get in the way of our ability to understand and be in right relationship with Jesus?

How might our relationships with one another be different--more authentic, more intimate, more life-giving--if we could come to understand and relate to other people on their own terms?

How might our relationship with Jesus be different--more authentic, more intimate, more life-giving--if we could come to understand and relate to Jesus on his own terms?

It's something worth thinking about. Something worth striving towards. In the meantime, perhaps the most honest and life-giving choice when faced with the Mystery of God, the Mystery of Jesus, the Mystery of Another Person, even the Mystery of our Own Existence, is to dispense with labels and definitions altogether--or at least to hold them humbly and lightly.

At numerous points in John's Gospel, Jesus dispenses with titles and metaphors and labels to explain himself altogether, and like the God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush long ago before him, Jesus identifies himself with the simple words: I AM. **Ego Eimi.**

To the terrified disciples in the boat in a storm Jesus says simply,  
I AM, do not be afraid (6:20)

On trial before Pilate, Jesus says: "*For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*"

Perhaps that is God's invitation for us, here today. Not to understand and define Jesus. Not to "get it right."

But simply to listen to and believe the truth-telling voice of Jesus when he says:  
I AM. Do not be afraid.

Because this is the truth...that underneath all the jubilant songs and the glittering crowns and the royal banners of Christ the King the fact is, we ARE often afraid. And, like Pilate before us, we don't often know what to make of Jesus--or anyone else, for that matter.

Friends:

Today, I believe God is calling us to listen and believe  
the truth-telling voice of Jesus when he says:  
I AM. do not be afraid

I believe God is inviting us to relax into that promise and the possibility that sometimes,

In the Holy Mystery of the Presence of God,  
the Creator of the Universe  
This truth: **I AM** is enough, I AM holds all we need to know

In the Holy Mystery of the Presence of Jesus  
Who calms the storms and heals the suffering and dines with sinners?  
This truth: **I AM** is enough, I AM holds all we need to know

In the Holy Mystery of the Presence of Another  
A friend, a stranger, a parent, a child,  
This truth: **I AM** is enough, I AM holds all we need to know

And in the Holy Mystery of our Own Selves  
As we search for our own center in the midst of chaos and change  
This truth: **I AM** is enough, I AM holds all we need to know.

I AM. Amen.