

*33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters\* again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' 34 Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' 35 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?' 36 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.' 37 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, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'*

Long ago the world had kings, France and Spain, England too. And every king had a kingdom to rule. Subjects.

The king said give me your money, the people gave. The king said march in my army, the people marched. The king said obey my laws, the people obeyed, or else.

Long ago.

Today kings are mostly a part of that world that used to be. Like Kerosene lanterns, and cowboy shows and modesty. The romance novels may bring back that world for some, but they are only for reading when there is no life that needs living - at the end of the day when there is time to dream of the world the way I wish it would be. But the world is not that way, full of beautiful women meeting just the right man and living happily ever after.

And kings.

Once upon a time we can imagine that people were mostly good. When fathers and mothers and their children did not use four letter words, nor cheat on their taxes for there were none, and everyone did an honest day's labor for an honest day's pay. And on Sunday the whole family dressed in their best and piled in the car to the church where all was peace and everyone believed in Christ their king. Back then.

We are modern now. The only rules we know are "if it feels good do it", and "look out for old number one", and "do unto your neighbor before he does unto you".

Now it sometimes seems that Christ the king has about as much power and influence as the king of England - a figurehead - interesting - makes us feel good to think about him, like we feel good reading the novels about long ago.

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone was like Jesus?

But in the real world Christ does not seem to be much a king. In the real world money is king, and lord and master. In the real world money gives us life and hope and power and

security. Money, not Christ but money will make all our dreams come true and buy us a longer life. Our children may not be believers but we will do our best to see that they get the finest education and have all the advantages to get ahead in this world and make a name for themselves.

We'll teach our children that if the tax code says it's all right, it's all right. Don't worry about how it affects the poor, the weak, children.

Christ the King, crowds may come out to see him, but will anyone obey, or march in his army, or hear his law as absolute? Will anyone?

"Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked. Pilate knew better. Back then when kings really were kings, Pilate knew that Jesus was not a king, just a peasant - just one more man to be ground up in the gears of history as the world turned.

But Jesus answered: "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my subjects would be fighting to save me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom does not belong here."

Jesus a king? Yes, but of some other world, some other place, for Pilate a king of some other people a fantasy - no threat.

No more threat than Jesus seems today to business as usual in our world. Anything goes as long as you don't get caught. Sex, politics, business. Words are empty, used to conceal, to lie, to hide. But no more in our world for truth. We smile to one another's face but behind closed doors we speak words of condemnation, of anger.

So then, Pilate said, "So you are a king?"

"You say that I am a king," Jesus replied. "The reason why I have been born, the reason I have come into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Truth, retorted Pilate. And what is that?

Like Pilate we have come of age. Now everyone has their own truth, everyone is their own Lord, their own master.

But Jesus said, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Obeys the king, we might say.

Is the king's subject.

Is subject to him.

Christ, the king.

Will he be more than a figurehead for you? Will he be more than some nice character in a story from long ago? Will he be the one who owns you, not only late at night the last thing before you go to bed, but owns you at work, and at the bowling alley, and in your car? Your Lord?

Pilate is long ago forgotten, only in the book about Jesus and in the creed about Jesus is he ever mentioned. He was King for a day, a moment in the history of this world.

But when every Pilate has come and gone, Jesus shall remain. King not only of the Jews, but of all creation. King and Lord and master of everyone who ever was or is or will be.

There is one question for you today: Is Jesus your King? Will you listen to him, live for him, love him, trust in him, obey him? Your life is your answer.

Christ is King, but will he be yours? mine? ours? Will we be subject to him?

The answer is no. We will not be subject to him, listen to him, live for him, trust in him, obey him. He will continue to be more of a figurehead than our Lord. O, we will rush to him in crisis, trust in him when we've run out of time or doctors or money. But in the meantime we will do everything possible take care of ourselves so we will not have to depend on him.

How can I say that? Because I know that we are in bondage to sin. In the garden the serpent enticed the man and the woman with the promise that they would be like God. That is how we want life, with us in charge. Not waiting for God, trusting in God, but taking care of things ourselves. Not obeying God's word, but living by our wisdom, our money, our strength. Giving God a place only at the edges, when we are near death - that is sin.

Christ died for sinners. That is what scripture says. Paul wrote of himself, "Christ died for sinners of whom I am chief."

Look around you here - look around out there in the world, everyone you see is a sinner. Everyone is unworthy of God, the rich, the poor, males and females, young and old, all rebellious, all straying sheep. You and I. Sinners. As unworthy as Pilate who put Jesus to death.

But Christ died for sinners. For the modest and those who have lost their modesty. For girl scouts, and cowboys, and Hell's Angels. For crack dealers and Sunday School teachers. For all of them Jesus stood trial before Pilate, and bowed his head in death on the cross. Who

will live in the houses and walk the paths of Jesus Kingdom? Unworthy ones, people who are completely unworthy.

Is that kingdom for you? To have no claim on God but Jesus. No way to hold yourself up as better than any of the others - more deserving.

Simply receiving his love as a gift.

Only then will Jesus be king in you, more than a figurehead, your Lord. Look into your heart. There is no reason for Jesus to love one such as you, yet he does love you. And me, a sinner.

He is king, and Lord, our God.