

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 21 November 2021

*Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. As we listen to your word, open our hearts and minds so that we can see, hear and speak the truth in You. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.*

John 18:33-37

### The King of Truth

The reading informs that Jesus is the King and his kingly role is to testify to the truth. And it ends with the words of Pilate: 'What is truth?' which may be one of the fundamental questions in life. But Pilate doesn't wait for the answer. So we'll see what Jesus' kingship entails and how the reign of the King is exercised. It will allow us to testify to the King of truth.

Jesus' kingship begins with the opening verse of the gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."<sup>1</sup> In John's gospel, Jesus' identity is often revealed through the events. As read, the charge of kingship is the central question of Jesus' trial before Pilate. Jesus never answers Pilate's question, "Are you the king of the Jews?" in a straightforward way. Here, John uses the trial and crucifixion to display Jesus' kingship and the faithlessness of those who reject him. The trial, however, makes us wonder what this kingship involves in terms of power and authority. Although Pilate and the Jewish leaders may appear to be powerful, Jesus appears as the one who exercises authority. The scene between Jesus and Pilate is the height of the gospel's irony as Pilate does not question Jesus' kingship or guilt of the charges brought before him. Pilate rather affirms Jesus' kingship as his title on the cross witnesses and his resolve against the chief priests not to change the title in Hebrew, Latin and Greek: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."<sup>2</sup>

It is the beginning of Passover when Israel would stop and remember God's kingship and rule over other powers. But when Pilate asks the Jews again, "Shall I crucify your king?" and people reply, "we have no king but the emperor."<sup>3</sup> The Jews' rejection of Jesus leads them to deny God's kingship and embrace Roman rule.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:1

<sup>2</sup> John 19:19-22

<sup>3</sup> John 19:15

It is clear that many do not understand Jesus' kingship, and others reject it outright. Throughout chapters 18-19, Jesus is "handed over" through a chain of command that involves a number of people as responsible for Jesus' death. Although we may say that Judas Iscariot is the one who 'betrayed' Jesus,<sup>4</sup> the Greek word translated 'betray' – *paradidomi* (to deliver; deliver over) also describes the actions of the Jews and Pilate. In John 18:36, Jesus uses this word to describe his being "handed over to the Jews." Pilate also tells Jesus that the Jews "handed you over to me."<sup>5</sup> At the end of the trial, however, it is Pilate who "hands Jesus over" to be crucified.<sup>6</sup> Thus the culpability in Jesus' death does not rest with Judas alone but is shared through this act of betrayal or handing over. The truth of the King also reveals if a person is in the truth or not when it is handed over to one another.

A king reigns his kingdom. Under the King's reign, everything is subjected to the King's sovereign power. The truth that the King testifies to is his life as a whole revealed on the cross and through Easter. If Truth is King, how does this King reign on earth? We may find one of the examples from the story – Solomon and two mothers. The question was how the truth was revealed. An instant answer may be that Solomon's order to cut the living boy in half revealed the true mother of the boy. Initially, the point of the dispute was to whom the living boy belonged, as the two women's testimonies were conflicting. However, Solomon - the King of wisdom, penetrates the heart of the issue, which was not in the boy's living or dead, but motherly love. A mother's foremost priority would be in her baby's wellbeing, and happiness originated from God. Mother would do everything to keep her baby's safety. King Solomon's order to cut the living boy half only triggered the truth to be released. The truth reigns people's hearts as 'everyone who belongs to the truth listens to his voice.'<sup>7</sup> If so, what do we - his subjects owe our King?

Our duty as the subjects of the King of truth is to testify to the truth. In the present, we are not lacking in news or information but quite the opposite. We also encounter more fake news and false claims than before. Sometimes it is overwhelming. It often hinders us from keeping our integrity in the truth of Christ. How do we discern right things from false ones? If truth is not revealed as it is, will it be buried or disappear for good? It is not so. We have a good example

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<sup>4</sup> John 18:2

<sup>5</sup> John 18:35

<sup>6</sup> John 19:16

<sup>7</sup> John 18:37

in our midst. November is a special month for us as a Remembrance of Reconciliation, Lament and Healing for the Matawhero Tragedy. By the time we celebrated 150 years of the anniversary of the Tragedy a few years ago, we had understood it better enough to call it the Matawhero Tragedy rather than the Matawhero Massacre. It took 150 years for us to see the incident from unprejudiced and non-judgemental perspectives. The reflection on the series of unfortunate and unhappy cultural, economic, and spiritual confrontations between both sides only lets us see that truth of this incident is not about judging who was right and who was wrong. Rather it displayed the absence of the love of God, which should have reigned over each side but only human greed and reasons.

In truth, there are healings, reconciliation, love and peace. Soon, we will enter into Advent, a season of waiting, longing, and listening. Soon we will walk into the expectant darkness, waiting for the light to dawn, for the Truth to reveal itself, for the first cries of a vulnerable baby to redefine kingship, authority, and power forever. Indeed, we have good reasons to fear the erosion of truth as it is often uncomfortable and sometimes painful. But we are not a people bereft of hope. The King who reigns will not abandon us. The truth will survive; it has died and returned to life already. As the bearers of the truth, we testify to the truth continually. Even if the truth is handed over to the wrong hands, we know it will survive because it is from the King of truth. Amen.