

Christ the King Sunday - Year B 2006 - Jn 18: 33b-37

Over the past several weeks we have seen a sad story play out in the news.

- a. It started years earlier when a young evangelical pastor, Ted Haggard, built his small ministry into an immense church ministering to tens of thousands of people each week.
 - b. His influence only grew as he took his conservative Christian message national.
 - i. People loved his **message**
 - (1) because it gave clear answers in a world where things were not so clear;
 - ii. People loved the **messenger**
 - iii. because his strong marriage, loving wife and obedient children
 - (1) embodied everything they wanted to be
 - (2) and expected their leader to be .
 - c. But then the sordid details of his private life became public knowledge;
 - i. And overnight his ministry, his family, his life were destroyed.
 - d. Some were angry at him for his hypocrisy.
 - e. Others were overjoyed at his humiliation.
 - f. But others were simply frightened of how someone
 - i. who looked so holy could be so sinful, and in their fear rejected him
2. I must admit, I felt all those emotions, but more than anything else, I was sad.
- a. sad because it is always sad to see someone's life and family destroyed.
 - b. sad because Ted's repression and denial divided his life to the point that he lied not only to strangers, but to loved ones, to himself and ultimately, even to God.
 - c. But sad also because this is so often how we treat our leaders.
 - d. We invest them with power and authority
 - i. when they live up to **our** expectations,
 - e. but we abandon them when they do not.
3. Now Ted Haggard is no Jesus;
- a. but nevertheless, the same forces that brought him to where he now is,
 - i. rejected and abandoned,
 - b. carried Jesus to the place where we meet him in the Gospel this morning;
 - i. rejected and abandoned standing before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate.
 - c. Had it only been a few days before, we would have seen a mighty throng standing with him, waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna to the Son of David, the new king of Israel.
 - d. But it is not Palm Sunday; it is good Friday and Jesus is alone, because
 - i. Many were angry at him for challenging their faith.

Christ the King Sunday - Year B 2006 - Jn 18: 33b-37

- ii. Others were overjoyed that he was finally getting what was coming to him.
 - (1) But Judas betrayed him,
 - (2) Peter denied him
 - (3) and all the other disciples in their fear abandoned him.
- iii. Because he had been arrested and imprisoned just like any other criminal instead of being the new King they wanted him to be .
- e. Even Pilate asks him, “are you king of the Jews?”
 - i. Seeking to make him into a threat - a rival to him, to Rome and to Caesar.
- 4. Everyone wants Jesus to be a king!
 - a. everyone, it would seem, accept Jesus;
 - b. for when Pilate asks him he evades the question;
 - c. saying that if he were a king, his followers would defend him; they did not, so clearly he is not a king; at least not by their standards;
- 5. Rather ,according to Jesus, he comes not to rule over others but to serve them.
 - a. And that service is summed up in one word; the truth.
 - i. he would testify to the truth; the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
- 6. No wonder they killed him!
 - a. For in a world filled with **lies**,
 - b. where custom and politics and even religion cause us to **deny** our deepest selves
 - c. And where **fear** of the truth can warp and destroy lives.
 - i. Jesus would testify;
 - (1) That in that world filled with lies,
 - (a) there was one who already knows us for who we truly are
 - (2) In that world filled with denial,
 - (a) there was one who already long since has accepted us
 - (3) In that world filed with fear
 - (a) there is one who says *fear not*
 - (b) because God in Jesus already knows the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about us all and still speaks to us, still calls us still invites us to follow him.
- 7. It is that unconditional acceptance that Jesus offers
 - a. that is the basis of the truth he testifies to and thus
 - i. we can reject him and thus that truth,
 - (1) as Judas and Peter do,
 - (2) as the disciples and even Pilate do,
 - (a) all choosing to believe he was a king after their own expectations.

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- ii. but we cannot accept him;
 - (1) Simply because he has already accepted us.
- 8. So Jesus is no king; at least in the way we understand kingship.
 - a. Nevertheless our Catholic Church chose to make him one,
 - b. with Pope Pius the XI in 1925 establishing the feast we celebrate today
 - c. He did it to counter the rise of communism which denied there was any higher authority than human authority,
 - i. and that there was no truth greater than the ones we create.
- 9. So often this feast is seen as one more example of the way
 - a. in which we seek to do what the disciples and even Pilate sought to do;
 - i. Make a king of Jesus.
 - ii. Wrapping him in robes and making him wear crowns.
 - b. But for Pius the feast of Christ the King was not about robes and crowns
 - i. it was about the fact there is an authority higher than human authority;
 - ii. And that this authority is not based on power and fear (or at least it shouldn't be)
 - (1) but simply the truth. The whole truth and nothing but the truth.
 - c. To speak the truth in love is what Jesus came to do.
 - i. To speak the truth in love is what Jesus calls us to do;
 - (1) To speak that truth to one another and even to ourselves.
 - d. To speak the truth isn't glorious, and often it leads not to a throne but to a cross;
 - e. But when we think of all the pain lying causes,
 - i. and all the damage that happens once the lie is revealed,
 - (1) When we think of the sad story of Ted Haggard,
 - f. Then we realize why Jesus understood his mission was to testify to the truth. Nothing more, nothing less.
 - i. For it is only the truth that ultimately liberates,
 - (1) and thus it is ultimately the truth that saves,
 - (2) not only in the next world,
 - ii. where the fullness of Jesus' kingdom is revealed, but in this one as well
 - g. where we glimpse that kingdom
 - i. every time we join him as witnesses to the truth.