

Our gospel reading comes from John's gospel and it's a great one to go with the theme of Christ the King Sunday. However, we always have to remember a few things when we turn to John's gospel, because John tells us about Jesus in a way different from the way we usually think.

The other three gospels in the Bible - Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us about Jesus in a pretty typical straightforward fashion - like you're reading a news article. But John's gospel is different. John's gospel is more like a selection of word pictures about Jesus, each vivid and detailed. And you'll remember that John uses a number of words differently than the way we usually do - or perhaps I should say, John likes to create double meanings for words and then play with the double meaning.

You'll remember me saying before that one of these words is the word "world". When we hear that we usually think the earth, or the universe. But in John it also means, well, as we were taught in seminary, "the sphere at enmity with God." Or, that which has turned away from God and rejected him. So, when we have the ever famous John 3:16 - for God so loved the world...

universe yes, ...but it also means that God so loved that which hates him and wants to do him harm that God still gives to it in love.

Another word John gives a double meaning is the word "Jews". And this one's dangerous. When we hear that we think of the Jewish people - the people of Israel. In that light, John's gospel is very anti-Semitic. And indeed John's gospel has been used by Christians over the centuries to justify all sorts of violence against Jews.

But that is not what John intended. It's impossible to absolutely verify who wrote John's gospel. Church tradition attributes it to the disciple John, but nowhere in the text does it say that. But it is quite likely that the author was Jewish. And Jesus and his closest followers were also all Jewish.

No, John's gospel is not anti-Semitic. Indeed many Jewish leaders were opposed to Jesus in his public ministry and so John's gospel calls anyone who doesn't get it and is opposed to God's revelation in Jesus a "Jew". Keep John's use of the words "world" and "Jew" in your mind as we look at these verses.

The scene is Jesus on trial before Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate derisively says to Jesus, "You are the King of the Jews?" Okay, John is using the common form of Jew here. Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on you own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew am I?" Of course he's not a Jew. He's a Roman through and through! He despises the Jewish people. But again, if Jew also means someone who is working against the revelation of God's nature in Jesus, well then, ironically Pilate is a "Jew".

Pilate regains the upper hand again by saying, "Your own nation and chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" What has Jesus done? What's he guilty of? He's done the works of the Father revealing God's nature to the world. That's why he's in so much trouble. Jesus replies, "My kingdom is not from this *world*." Again, remember John is playing with a double meaning. "If my kingdom were from this *world* my officers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the *Jews*. But as it is my kingdom is not from here."

There's lot's going on with the double meanings of the words. You can get it well enough and so I'm not going to spend the time to dissect it. All of this really sets up the line that the whole gospel of John revolves around. Jesus then 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." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

You'll remember a number of weeks ago we looked at the two contradictory creation accounts in the book of Genesis. We talked about how the biblical authors often put conflicting truths side by side in order to teach something different. That's okay, but it can leave us wondering what ultimately is truth?

Some people like to turn to scientific thought to find truth. That's tempting, but all too often you discover that the results of research end up in favor of whoever is funding the research. Plus, how many times have we gotten one form of dietary advice to just have it reversed a few years later and then reversed again!

This quest for absolute truth is not new to us. It plagued the ancient Greek philosophers too. And it plagued the Romans of Jesus day. Pilates question, "What is truth?" is a question of the ages.

That is why we can say the Gospel of John revolves around that verse. In all of John's irony's and playful double meanings, this is the greatest; a literary masterstroke in telling the story of Jesus. Perhaps it's even a joke.

Pilate, a "Jew" from, "this world" asks what is truth?

Pilate, you just asked the wrong question! The gospel of John isn't interested in teaching us what is truth. It wants us to discover *who* is truth. Pilate should have asked "Who is truth?" because Truth was staring him in the face!

That's what we want to focus on with Christ the King Sunday. Is this truth empowered by military might? Nope. Is this truth empowered by academic genius or incredible athletic talent? Nope. (In regards to our guest musicians today - is it amazing music? Nope.) What is truth? Who is truth? Irony again, which is why John uses it to teach his readers.

Truth is embodied in Jesus revealing God's love as unreserved self-gift for others - including as John would say, "Jews" and "the world"; which hated him.

It is counter-intuitive but it is true. That in order to be most fully you, you have to give most fully of yourself.

We live in a world full of people like Pilate - not the harsh government official part of Pilate - but the part of Pilate that saw power in earthly might - military, money, status. Then when a Jewish carpenter crosses his path witnessing to the truth he can't begin to see it and he has nothing but scorn.

Of course Jesus' coronation as king is not in his trial, but his crucifixion, which John's gospel portrays as the triumphal irony that it is. It is conquest through self-gift, not by taking.

May you have eyes to see more deeply than Pilate, and a greater grasp of the truth to know that wholeness comes by giving of yourself. And may you have the courage to face the pressure, and even witness to the truth, that will come from a world that thinks you crazy - not for what you believe, but for what you do.