

While I was born in New York State, from second grade on, I grew up in Elizabethtown, which is in Lancaster County. I put some roots down over there and learned to speak the language. I went native. And we weren't in Elizabethtown long, before the following would occur: A car pulls up; the driver rolls the window down (by hand!) leans out and asks Mom or Dad or eventually me (because this was as certain a part of my summers as sunburn at the shore), “Can you tell me how to get to Lancaster? We want to see the Amish; maybe take some pictures.”

Bear in mind that Elizabethtown is about 40 minutes north of the Amish Country, and while this is obviously in the dark ages before GPS, it was clear that these folks were not from here and they had a long way to go (in more ways than one) before they would be in the Amish Country; as for the pictures, I can only marvel at and be instructed by the forbearance the Amish continually exhibit.

Our text from John for Christ the King Sunday depicts a similar conversation. Pilate is the out-of-town tourist who not only doesn't have a clue but he doesn't have a clue that he doesn't have a clue. Jesus is trying to give him directions, but Pilate can't get there from here. He can't imagine that Jesus is a king. He cannot understand what Jesus means when he says, *John 18:36 (NRSV)* ³⁶ *“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 doesn't get it. If Jesus' kingdom isn't from here, then where is it from? Pilate doesn't get it, and I wonder, do I get it? Do we get it? Or are we just as bewildered as Pilate?

1. Jesus is not who he (we) think He is.

Pilate was in a precarious position. He had to please Rome, who had already expressed her displeasure with him, and he had to keep an unruly and rebellious people in line. Roman order must be preserved, but between the agitations of the Zealots and the intrigues of the Sanhedrin, it was a tall order, and history shows that he wasn't up to it.

He was in over his head, and if he wasn't careful, he could lose his head as a result.

Add in a religious festival celebrating among other things how Israel overthrew Pharaoh and was given this land by God, and Pilate's instincts for survival and self-preservation were on high alert. Then, the leaders of the Sanhedrin come to him and say they want to hand over Jesus because he claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of David, Israel's king.

A king? Alarms go off! Red flags wave!! Sirens wail!! A king! Pilate orders Jesus brought before him, and prepares himself for the pivotal battle of his life. Life and death are on the line and he must prevail!

Then Jesus is brought in, wearing the clothing of an ordinary Jewish worker; nothing fancy; nothing special; he doesn't look like a king, and he doesn't act like one either. There's no air of superiority, no condescending sneer; Jesus is humble and gentle.

John 18:33 (NRSV) “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus isn't who he thought he was.

John 18:34 (NRSV) ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”

Pilate is on the defensive, *John 18:35 (NRSV) “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”*

Pilate is trying to fit Jesus into a category he understands; he's trying to define Jesus in his terms. He wants to take a picture of the Amish.

Are we doing the same thing? Are we trying to define Jesus in our terms? Are we trying to fit him into categories we understand?

Are we trying to confine Jesus within the limits of our understanding, which is to say, “I know what I know and that's all I want to know. I believe what I believe and that's all I want to believe. So don't try to change me, Jesus. Don't try to change what I think or how I live! It's my life, and you are just a part of it!”

Jesus won't play that game. He will ask us what are we holding onto so tightly? What are we afraid to let go of? Can we trust him enough to try? What might our lives be like if we weren't afraid and we could let go?

Jesus is our King; he is our Lord; as such, we belong to him. Our lives belong to him. We can surrender to him and offer our lives to him, and in so doing, we can discover a peace and a hope like we've never known, but when we find that peace and hope are hard to come by, chances are, we've stopped surrendering and offering and have taken our lives back.

And Jesus won't play that game. He isn't who we think he is. He is more, so much more than we can possibly imagine or understand. We won't just spend our lives getting to know him; we will spend all of eternity knowing Jesus more and more.

“He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: “Follow thou me!” and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.” — [Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*](#)

2. My Kingdom Is Not From Here

Pilate doesn't get it, and Jesus tries to help him get there from here: John 18:36 (NRSV)

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.”*

So where is it from; and, what does this matter? The kingdom comes from God; the kingdom comes for the world.

We've had another difficult news week; as the repercussions from the Paris attack continue to unfold, armed terrorists in Mali seized a Radisson Hotel and took 170 people hostage. French, American, and Mali commandos stormed the hotel; their attack was successful, but 19 people died.

That's the world we live in; whether it's terrorism around the world, the heroin epidemic in our area, crime on our streets, conflict around the world, the slings and arrows of cruel fortune that afflict us all; we live in a world filled with brokenness, evil, and death.

Jesus' kingdom isn't from this world, and that is good news!

John Calvin observed, “[This] doctrine is useful to believers to the end of the world; for if the kingdom of Christ were earthly, it would be frail and changeable, because *1 Corinthians 7:31 (NRSV) ... the present form of this world is passing away*, but now, since it is pronounced to be heavenly, this assures us of its perpetuity. ...If we are cruelly treated by wicked men, still our salvation is secured by *the kingdom of Christ*, which is not subject to the [impulses] of men. In short, though there are innumerable storms by which *the world* is continually agitated, *the kingdom of Christ*, in which we ought to seek tranquility, is separated from *the world*.¹

The kingdom comes from God; it stands secure, and we who by faith are citizens of Christ's kingdom have a source of security that is untouched by the storms and strife of life. Yes, things change, sometimes not for the better, but the peace of Christ does not change, because the kingdom comes from God.

Ah, so the kingdom is simply spiritual; we should not concern ourselves with what our neighbor is going through. No, the kingdom comes for the world.

¹ Calvin, J. (1998). *John* (electronic ed., Jn 18:36). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

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John 18:37 (NRSV) 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.”

“Truth” isn’t some abstract category that belongs to philosophers and theologians. “Truth” is a way of life in this world. *John 8:31–32 (NRSV) “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*

The kingdom of God comes for the world with the promise: “The truth will make you free.” All that is false assures us that the way of falsehood is the way to get ahead and ultimately find salvation; no one will ever know, and look at the rewards! But we don’t venture very far down that path before we discover how much anxiety and fear are the fruit of falsehood: “They’ll find out. They won’t love the real me. I can’t bear the consequences; the responsibility is too much.” Perhaps Jack Nicholson was right in the classic scene from *A Few Good Men*, “You want the truth?... You can’t handle the truth.”

Is he right?

“The truth will set you free.” Imagine a life free from fear. Imagine a world where we could each be the person God created us to be without feeling like we had to conform to someone else’s standard. Imagine acceptance and forgiveness and mercy and peace as the way we live together in this world, because I have embraced the truth; I have accepted what is true about me; I have turned away from what is false, and that has set me free to accept what is true about you. I have done that individually; we have done that collectively.

This is far more than a mushy morality that proclaims that we all have our truth and what’s right for you isn’t necessarily right for me. This truth is truth that is revealed to us by God in Jesus Christ, our king. He is the truth; the kingdom comes in him, and he says: *John 10:10 (NRSV) ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

Imagine the kind of world we would live in if we all sought abundant life for all! Imagine if we had the courage to not focus on what “they” need to do but instead to ask, “What do I need to do?” “What do we need to do?” Imagine a world that was so filled with love and truth that falsehood and hate could not exist. Imagine that and recognize this simple man from Galilee for who he is, “So you are a king!”

The kingdom of God comes from God. The kingdom of God comes for the world. The kingdom comes in Jesus; Jesus isn’t who we think he is; he shrugs off any limitations and qualifications we try to impose on him, because they are false. He is the truth. He is our king; king of an enduring, eternal kingdom of truth that is not from here. Amen.