

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 93; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37
Christ the King Sunday B; 11.24.24; G. Miles Smith+

The year was 1925. World War I was over, but there was still much unresolved unrest, growing class divisions, increasing secularism, and smoldering national animosities in Europe. In response, Pope Pius XI established a special day in the church calendar called the “Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe”. It would later be adopted as “Christ the King Sunday”...by Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, other Protestants, Anglicans, and Episcopalians...and is observed every year...on the last day of the church year...right before the beginning of the season of Advent. *I find it helpful to be reminded that this special church day...was a response to real world events.*

There can be times when, without our quite realizing it, the story of Christ can seem like some kind of sublime *fantasy* story that we gather at church to appreciate...which then becomes an occasion for *real* things to follow--like coffee hour. And yes, rightfully, Episcopalians, really do love coffee hour. :) But we also need to be reminded that...as sublime as our gospel story really is...it has always faced the reality of the world...as it really is...and it calls us to love the world...and ourselves...into a better place.

One such occasion of the gospel story itself facing the world head on...was when Jesus stood before Pilate...the Roman governor and legal representative...of the second emperor of the Roman Empire...Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus. And it was Pilate’s responsibility to decide...on behalf of Caesar...what all the fuss was about with Jesus, and why he had been arrested by the Jewish leaders, and brought before him for judgment. You can tell from the convoluted interrogation scene in the Gospel of John...that Pilate seemed only capable of listening to Jesus...up to a point. He wasn’t interested in Jesus’ theological thinking...he wasn’t interested in talking about “truth”...Pilate only wanted to hear from Jesus himself...whether or not...Jesus considered himself a *king*. And Jesus *did* claim a kingdom...and while it was not *from* this world...it was *in* this world...and the face of that kingdom was standing face-to-face with Pilate. |

What if Jesus was standing face-to-face with...you? How would you imagine such a moment with Jesus? And while we might not be in the role of an interrogator like Pilate...we might have our own urgent questions...or some great perplexity we might want to voice.

So, I’ll speak for *myself*...and then maybe you’ll better imagine *for yourself*. Knowing so many things we have been learning together in Church over the years...if I was standing before Jesus...my first response would probably be *speechlessness*. I would likely be standing *silent* before Jesus...like the moments that catch me when I’m outside...and suddenly my mind is wrenched away from its busy convolutions by...the sight of leaves blowing in the wind...or an early morning winter light...or a full moon at night...and I am silenced...by wonder and awe...with no words that can be spoken...but only my full attention given. Jesus...face-to-face...would have my full attention...like that. |

But also present in that moment of silence, standing before Jesus, I might experience something verging on *sorrow*. Sorrow for all that I did not do so well. Sorrow for the whole world in which I participate...which has also not done so well. Sorrow...for the individual beloved people, beloved creatures, and destroyed places I have known. And I would want to know, but maybe could not say: Why? And will they all be okay somehow? |

And, standing face-to-face with Jesus, I would want to know: *What do you want me to do now? May I...can I...serve you?* If I was *alive* in that moment...then where could I put my wonder and awe and sorrow *to work...in the world* so I could be true to Jesus? And if I was *dead*...then where could I put my wonder and awe and sorrow *to work...in the heavenly realms* so I could be true to Jesus?

Because, standing face-to-face with Jesus, it would be clear as day, that he really is...Christ the King...not only of our souls...not only of the Church...not only of all nations...but the King of the Universe of all things...seen and unseen. And standing face-to-face with Jesus...it would be clear...that he is the new beginning.