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John 18:33-37

November 21, 2021

Christ the King

Prepared for: Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville SC

* Let’s talk politics! Or, maybe, just bear with me while I ask you some political questions.
  + What should we do about the refugees that are flooding our nation’s southern border?
    - Accept them all?
    - Screen them, and accept any who aren’t criminals?
    - Send them all back to their own nations?
  + What is the best practice for ensuring that people who live in poverty are fed, clothed, and sheltered safely?
    - Tax the wealthy and use the money to provide for the poor? If that’s what we do, then how do we define “wealthy”?
    - Take the government completely out of it and rely on the generosity of churches and other charitable organizations to provide what is needed?
  + What about the idea of equal rights? What, exactly, is covered under those rights?
    - Should women have autonomy over all their choices?
    - Should everyone—regardless of sexual orientation—be allowed to marry?
    - Who gets to be discriminatory? Churches? Businesses? On what grounds?
* I know! I know! “Pastor, we don’t want to hear about politics from the pulpit!”
* Jesus ***was*** a political figure. 
  + Today’s gospel is about politics, and Jesus uses words as skillfully as any twenty-first century politician.
    - “Are you king of the Jews?” Pilate asks.
    - And then, as so often happens in political debates today, Jesus doesn’t actually answer the question. He spins off and talks some weirdness about a kingdom that’s not part of the world.
    - Pilate reiterates the question, “So you are a king?”
    - Again, Jesus doesn’t really answer other than to throw it back to Pilate.
* Reign of Christ/Christ the King
  + Guess what? This very day—the festival of Christ the King—exists because of politics!
  + It began in the 1920s (apologies to Wednesday’s Bible Study group, where I gave you the wrong date)
    - It was initiated by Pope Pius XI, in response to growing nationalism and secularism after World War I.
      * Perhaps most clearly seen in sentiments like, “America first!”
        + Not unique to Americans
        + Citizens of many nations believe that their own nation is the best.
* A hundred years after the feast of Christ the King was added to the church year, neither nationalism nor secularism has diminished.
  + Nationalism: The idea that one’s own nation is superior to others, and should only be responsible for its own citizens.
    - Christianity: God calls us to care for our neighbors in exactly the same way we care for ourselves.
      * This does not exclude neighbors from outside our nation’s borders.
  + Secularism: The idea that religion and government should be completely separated from one another (more familiarly recognized in the US as “separation of church and state”).
    - Christianity: That same call to care for others should be embodied in every aspect of our lives—including our politics—and absolutely should affect how we vote.
* Jesus ***was not*** a partisan political figure! “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,” says Jesus in today’s selection from John’s gospel, shortly after he says, “My kingdom is not from this world.”
  + Already-Not Yet of Lutheranism.
    - Already: Christ does reign in our world. This is the kingdom of God.
    - Not yet: God has not yet fulfilled all the promises.
  + Our world is still broken. And the hard Truth is that, regardless of what our personal politics are, when the day comes that we stand before the judgement throne, we will all have grounds for condemnation.
* Good News: The Truth that Jesus came to proclaim is that in the battle between God and evil, ***God wins***.