

Advent 1, 2013  
John 18:33-37

Part I

Mood changes are a part of life. If we have a good day, our mood picks up. If we have a bad day, we end up down in the dumps. If merchants had a good Black Friday, their businesses look up. If Black Friday sales plummet, their business just might run into financial ruin. If teams have success, they feel satisfied. If they don't, they feel discouraged.

To be sure such mood changes stand out in the football world. When your team is winning, the mood is good. Fans are eager to jump on the bandwagon. They come out of the woodwork to support the team. When the team is not winning, the mood changes quickly. Fans imagine the worst. Many of them sink back into the woodwork. Some even begin to call for the coach's head.

Our text is part of such a mood change. Five days earlier, the mood in Jerusalem was festive. Jerusalem's king was coming; and he was riding on a donkey. People came out of the woodwork to see him. Hundreds of thousands lined the road to Jerusalem. Many of them carried palm branches with them in their hands. They strewed them on the road like a red carpet for the King.

As they saw him approaching, they crooned to see him. Just a glimpse would suffice. When he passed by the masses chanted, “Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!”<sup>i</sup>

How quickly things changed! Just five days later, in the wee hours of Friday morning, this King is on trial. He had been betrayed, arrested and brought into court before Pilate. In that court the mob was not praising him with hosannas. Instead it was calling for his head.

“Crucify him! Crucify him!”<sup>ii</sup>

## Part II

So, why was this King on trial? He was on trial because his enemies brought a *bogus* charge against him. They said that Jesus was trying to establish a *political* kingdom. The irony in this charge is that is what *they* wanted. They wanted a king to deliver them from Roman rule...but Jesus did not give it to them. Since he didn't they wanted to get rid of him. What better way then to accuse him of sedition. It is why Pilate asked, “Are you King of the Jews?”

Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight.” Earlier that night Jesus' servants thought they would. When Jesus' enemies came to arrest him, Peter drew his sword to fight. Though he did, Jesus told Peter to put his sword away. He hadn't come to fight but to die for sinners.

The point is Jesus' kingdom does not use the sword. It is the kingdom of the world that bears the sword. Swords and tanks, guns and drones, battle ships and nukes make up its arsenal. Politicians and diplomats, soldiers and police, judges and lawyers make up its personnel. It is their job to institute and enforce laws; to threaten to coerce the rebellious. That is what they are called to do by God;<sup>iii</sup> and we, as *individual citizens* living in the world *can serve* in such capacities.

The trouble is, *the church*, at times, wants to *interfere* in the kingdom of the world. It does when it thinks it has a political role; that its role is to be politically active. Then it thinks that its *business* to legislate laws and endorse candidates. It believes that if the church has success in this endeavor, then the world will be an *ideal* place; it will create the kingdom of heaven on earth.

This mistaken thinking is not surprising. It isn't, because our sinful self thinks it *should* have the kingdom of heaven on earth. After all, God's people deserve it. So our sinful self thinks we deserve the good life; to have success at every corner; to be financially set. It believes God owes us a nice home; a family that always gets along; a personality without any flaws. It imagines that it is our right to have it all; to seize the day; to win at all costs. That's the kind of kingdom our sinful self thinks we deserve - an *ideal* one.

...but it often doesn't look like that, does it? We feel burnout; run on empty, have nothing left in the tank,

have no more to give. We feel depression; sadness covers us in its dark blanket, brokenness shatters the heart, giving up is where we end up. We feel taken advantage of; stepped on, passed over, unappreciated. At the bottom of all of this is sin. Sin has invaded our kingdoms.

So, why has sin done that? To see why let's back up to the trial in Pilate's courtyard. Pilate heard Jesus' answer, "My kingdom is not of this world." When Pilate heard that, he connected the dots. "Jesus *has* a kingdom. That means Jesus *admits* to being a King." So, Pilate puts the question to Jesus, again, "Are you a king then?"

It all must have been somewhat of a curiosity to Pilate. Jesus stood before him, looking like *anything* but a king - his wrists bound in fetters; his face bruised from fisticuffs earlier that night; himself deserted by all servants. He did not look like the king Pilate served, that's for sure. Caesar was successful, the top dog in the world. He was powerful, commanding Rome's mighty legions. He had glory, all the best of Rome was his.

That's how it is with kings in this world. Kings make a good *impression*. They are surrounded by pomp and circumstance. They wine and dine with the elite; mix with the top money people. Beneath the façade, though, the image is *tarnished*. They are sinners. They are not immune to greed, power grabs and other sins in high places.

Are we any different? No! We are not. Our sinful self wants to grab for all the power it can get, too. That is,

it wants to be king in its own kingdom; to be king of the hill. The sinful self puts “me, myself and I” on the throne of our lives. It does when it wants it my way or no way; when we brown nose to get ahead; when we tell white lies to get what we want; when we grasp for forbidden fruit.

The trouble with this is that then there is no room for the King of kings. There isn't because our sinful self pushes him off the throne; and our sinful self is led by the devil himself. In reality, he wants to take us down to hell with him.

This is the reason for the mood change we noted at the beginning; the mood change from Palm Sunday to Good Friday. Our sinful self wants to be king and have its own kingdom.

### Part III

Imagine the *contrast* back at that trial for a moment. Pilate is presiding. He is dressed in military clothing fit for Caesar's servant; accompanied by other Roman officials; guarded by well armed soldiers. Pilate is surrounded by glory. Before him stands Jesus. Jesus is forsaken. He is bruised and bloodied. His wrists are bound in fetters. He has no trappings of glory, only shame.

It is in this setting that Jesus answers, “I am a king.” Then he adds, “For this I was born.” Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary; born a man just like Pilate, born just like

you and me. Not only that, Jesus is *more*. “For this reason I *came* into the world.” Before Jesus was born he was; he was God. God came in flesh. God in flesh stands before Pilate. Pilate is looking into the face of God, though it is hidden from his eyes.

...and why did this King come? “That I might bear witness to the truth.” That’s why! Jesus bears witness to the truth because he is truth wrapped up in human skin. There is no greed; no power grab; no selfishness in him. There is no sin in him at all.

Jesus, then, is truth incarnate, who came to die for you. He came into the world to take your place. He did when the Father gave Jesus your untruth; the facades, the lies, the power grabs. He gave Jesus your sin; your shame; your death. About it, the apostle wrote, “He was crucified in weakness.”<sup>iv</sup> To be sure, it was *anything* but a kingly image...but then the apostle adds, “He lives by the power of God.”<sup>v</sup> Though Jesus died in weakness, he came back from the dead triumphant. Triumphant, he now sits at his Father’s right hand.

There all your enemies are put under his feet – sin, hell and the devil. That is, he has put away your sin of making yourself king. It’s not what you or I deserve, that’s for sure. You and I only deserve the King’s wrath. Instead, in mercy he pardons you. His pardon wins you over to him. He did, the Small Catechism says, “that I might be his own, and live under him in his kingdom.”

That's what it all comes down to. You and I have become a part of Jesus' kingdom; and Jesus' kingdom is not a part of this world. That is, his kingdom does not bear the sword. That is the job of the kingdom of the world. God's kingdom is not about the sword, then, but about forgiveness. It is all about giving you forgiveness by means of preaching the gospel and communing you at the Lord's Table.

It's why Jesus says at the end, "he who is of the truth hears my voice." You and I hear the King's voice in the Means of Grace. There, he forgives you all your sins and *gives you* the kingdom. It's his promise to you, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne."<sup>vi</sup> Talk about giving you the kingdom! You can't have more of the kingdom than sitting with him on God's throne. It's what awaits you in glory.

That's what Jesus gives you as you hear his voice. It's what, today, the first Sunday in Advent, is about. Today marks a place in time; the beginning of a new year. No. It is not the secular New Year. That begins on January 1. The church's New Year begins, today, the first Sunday in Advent. It is a new year in which you get to hear the King's voice again. It is a new year of grace.

It is, because the King comes to you in the midst of sin with his forgiveness. He comes amid depression and burnout with his presence; amid pain and heartache to comfort and console; amid weakness and suffering to bear you up by his gracious word.

In that word, then, the King's voice *is* all about the forgiveness of sins and promises of grace. By means of them he makes you and keeps you a part of his kingdom. There's not a better way to start this new year of grace and to continue in it. That's setting the right mood; grace, forgiveness and eternal life are yours in Christ, the King! Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> John 12.13

<sup>ii</sup> John 19.6

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 13.4

<sup>iv</sup> II Corinthians 13.4

<sup>v</sup> II Corinthians 13.4

<sup>vi</sup> Revelation 3.21