

“What Is Truth?” This is one of the most provocative lines in scripture—perhaps *the* most provocative question in Scripture. It is uttered by Pontius Pilate, the only human besides Jesus and the Virgin Mary that we mention in the Apostle’s creed, whose name is forever connected to the phrase “suffered under.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asks this question at a particularly frustrating moment of his questioning of Jesus—the questioning that eventually leads to Jesus’ suffering and death. See, Pilate is actually trying to figure out a way that he can let Jesus off the hook. He is stuck between a rock and hard place, trying to appease the temple leaders, trying to calm the increasingly rowdy crowd. He’s juggling his own sense of power and authority and the powerful demands of the people he’s supposed to be in charge of.

He continually asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews—a charge the temple leaders accuse him of, which, they somewhat ironically point out, would put him at odds with the empire and the emperor that Pilate works for. “We have no king but Caesar,” the occupied people shout. And so Pilate asks him again if he is a king. Jesus neither confirms nor denies it, he simply says “My kingdom is not of this world”

“My kingdom is not of this world,” that seems pretty obvious, right? The Kingdom of God can’t be the same as the earthy kingdoms, or empires, or even our republics or democratic societies we have known. God’s kingdom has to be different, has to be more. As Pastor Pete reminded us last week, the Kingdom of God is not so much a *place where* we live but rather a *way that* we live.

Living another way, living as people of The Way, living as people who follow Jesus the Way, and the Truth and the Life, all of that has never been so clearly needed in our world as it has been in these past few weeks. In light of the attacks in Paris, Beirut and Bamako, imagining a peaceable kingdom seems impossible. Closer to home, senseless violence, rushes to judgment, partisan stand offs, Facebook shaming, immigrant blaming, and sound-byte debates—in the midst of all of that God’s kingdom looks so far off, at least in the world as we know it. Working for God’s kingdom while living in the kingdoms, institutions and

societies we know seems at least counter-cultural, if not even ridiculous to think that any of our efforts and energies can turn the world around into the way God envisions it.

Still, today's reading from Revelation reminds us that Jesus "made us a kingdom." So, following Christ as we do, it is not only that we begin recognize the kingdom of God in our midst or that we acknowledge that the kingdom of God is *not* like our early institutions. Rather, it is our calling to enter into the mission of God in such a way that we are clearly making the conscious decision to work for God's kingdom. This is the message of Christ the King Sunday—today's festival whose name we bear here at CtK, the festival of the church year that celebrates the reality we claim every time we mention our congregation's name out loud. Christ is our King. He is our truth.

So, in an on-going act of truth, as a way of putting our compassion into action, I have been trying to work a bit on my CtK Vision. I've taken our existing mission statement as a starting point and have been attempting to re-work it into more Visionary language. I've been trying to transform the images of what we say we as Christ the King *do* in our mission and ministry into a statement of *who we are*—or better who God may be calling us to be as we discover God's truth, follow Christ's way, and enter the life of the Spirit. It's a work in progress, but here's what I've come up with so far: My vision for Christ the King is that we are called to be. A diverse community **gathering** around Word and Sacrament; People of all ages **growing** in the practice of their faith in Christ; Followers of Jesus **giving** of their time and money in service to God's mission.

Let's take them one by one. First, it seems to me that we need to see ourselves as a diverse community gathering around Word and Sacrament. That particular act of gathering is essential to our identity as a Christian community known as Christ the King, it is the key to our unity in the face of our diversity. Sure, we can and should also gather around Thanksgiving pies or Smorgasbord buffet. Yes, we can and should gather for choir rehearsal or to host the block party or to provide Sunny Lunches to children in need. And certainly we can and should gather in circles and small groups and committees and teams of every stripe. But the truth is what's central, what's fundamental, what's indispensable is that we gather primarily around Word and Sacrament. That we gather first and foremost to hear

God's work proclaimed among us, and to share in Baptism and Holy Communion, the means of Grace by which we receive the living God and are empowered to be God's people—God's hands and feet out there in the world. Everything else we do in our life together is secondary at best, and distracting at worst.

Second, I see Christ the King as people of all ages **growing** in the practice of their faith in Christ. We don't ever graduate from faith formation. We don't ever "age out" of learning or growing in the things of the spirit. People of all ages, of every generation, and of all levels of knowledge and understanding need to continue to grow in our faith. And when I say grow in our faith, I don't just mean in a grow in a heady way, not just in a "collection of information" or "learning of facts" sort of way. Growing in our faith necessarily means growing in the practice of our faith, learning how to be faithful and live faithfully and put our faith and our love and our *compassion* into action.

And finally, my vision for CtK is that we should see ourselves more and more as followers of Jesus **giving** of their time and money in service to God's mission. There are lots of different ways to talk about our shared identity here at Christ the King. At times I think we can get a little stuck on our descriptions of that identity—and we can be tempted even to use those descriptions to categorize us, to rank us, to divide us. New members versus charter Members. Voting members versus youth members. Mainstream members versus minority members. The truth is, our identity here ought to be first and foremost as disciples—followers of Jesus. And as such, we ought not get so bogged down in the minutia of our own involvement that we forget even for a minute why we're doing any of it. We need to be reminded over and over again that everything that we do as a congregation, every activity, every ministry, every group, every budget line item, every meeting, every report, every campaign, everything we do in this building, in this neighborhood, and in the world needs to flow from our calling to enter fully into **God's** mission. That is the truth about our giving of ourselves, our time, our energy, and yes, our money. It's not about us; it's about God and God's mission. That is our truth.

Maybe you've seen this Facebook meme which tells us that punctuation saves lives.



Yes, a simple comma could be the difference tween life and death.

Well similarly, I'm reminded on this particular festival day, as we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, of another little comma that can be very helpful—even lifesaving for us. Today is a particularly good day to be reminded that here in this place, we worship Christ, the King.... not ... Christ the King.

Do you see the difference a comma makes? At the center of our life of faith, at the center of our shared identity, at the center of our very being as disciples is the simple truth that we worship Christ ... the King. And though we been a dynamic, vibrant presence in ministry known as Christ the King Lutheran Church for nearly 55 years, we don't worship ourselves. We don't worship our congregation, nor its ministries, nor its outputs, nor its traditions, not even the great impact we have truly made here in New Brighton and far, far beyond.

The truth is, especially on this Christ the King Sunday, sometimes we need to remember, we need to be reminded, that we worship the one who called us together in the first place to be this congregation. We worship Christ, the King.

And that, my friends, is the truth. Amen.