

Christ The King Sunday

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Revelation 1: 4b-8
John 18: 33-37

God Friendened Me

A reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 18, verses 33-37

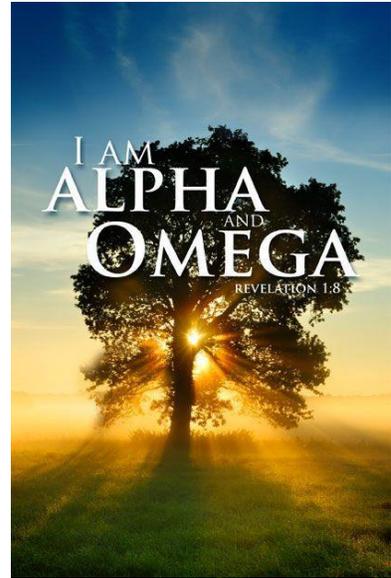
Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

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."

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."



I was trying to watch a new show the other day, and I saw an advertisement for this show on NBC called God Friendened Me. Has anyone seen it yet? So, in my boredom I watched the first two episodes...may not be something I continue to watch, but there was an interesting story line.

There is a young man, Miles Hall, who grew up in a Christian home but he does not believe in God. He's created a podcast about his unbelief. Then God sends him a friend request on Facebook. After this request, odd things start happening to Miles that cause him to question his unbelief. I won't ruin the remainder of the show for you, but that's the gist of the plot line.

It made me think, what if God friendened me?

I might be in the same boat as Miles, not because of any unbelief, but because that's too intimate. I don't imagine God in my Facebook or Instagram! That's where I go to find cute videos of puppies or see what my friend who lives in Utah is doing. Or where I post updates on my DIY Christmas décor, or new Pinterest finds. God doesn't belong there...

Well why would God want to know the things I post or the people I'm friends with? That seems insignificant. It's my world. Not my spiritual world...

This is when the red alert light is blinking over my head... Mayday! Mayday! You're approaching a spiritual collision...Mayday! Mayday! You are approaching Christian disaster.

If we all sat here for a minute and took the time to think about it, would you accept God's friend request? What if you could text with Jesus, watch this video:

<https://youtube/TCjfCDM6BE>

Today in the liturgical calendar we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. This is always the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Sunday before we begin Advent.

Pope Pius XI instituted The Feast of Christ the King in 1925, to be celebrated throughout the universal church. He connected the increasing denial of Christ as king to the rise of secularism throughout much of Europe. Sound familiar? At the time many Christians (including Catholics) began to doubt Christ's authority and existence, as well as the Church's power to continue Christ's authority.

Pius XI, and the rest of the Christian world, witnessed the rise of non-Christian dictatorships throughout Europe, and saw Catholics being persuaded by these earthly leaders. These dictators also often attempted to assert authority over the Church. The feast of Christ the King, or Christ the King Sunday was instituted when devotion to the Eucharist was at a low point, and when respect for Christ and the Church was waning...when the feast was needed most.

Pius hoped the institution of the feast would have various effects. They were:

1. That nations would see that the Church has the right to freedom, and immunity from the state (*Quas Primas*, 32).
2. That leaders and nations would see that they are bound to give respect to Christ (*Quas Primas*, 31).
3. That the faithful would gain strength and courage from the celebration of the feast, as we are reminded that Christ must reign in our hearts, minds, wills, and bodies (*Quas Primas*, 33).

The earliest Christians identified Jesus with the predicted Messiah of the Jews. The Jewish word "messiah," and the Greek word "Christ," both mean "anointed one," and came to refer to the expected king who would deliver Israel from the hands of the Romans. Christians believe that Jesus is this expected Messiah. Unlike the messiah most Jews expected, Jesus came to free all people, Jew and Gentile, and he did not come to free them from the Romans, but from sin and death.

Christians have been celebrating Jesus as Christ for a long time before Pius started Christ the King Sunday. In Advent, Christians wait for his second coming in glory. On Christmas, Jesus is "born this day, the King of the Jews." During Holy Week we recognize Christ is the Crucified King. On Easter, Jesus is resurrected in power and glory. And the Ascension is when Jesus returns to the glory he had with God before the world was created. However, Pius XI wanted a specific day to commemorate Christ as king so he instituted the feast in the Western calendar in 1925.

Today with many Christians, we will celebrate Christ the King Sunday. Unfortunately, in some mainline Protestant churches "king" language is not popular, and the feast is downplayed.

We think of a king as a cruel and unjust ruler who takes all the glory for himself. Our image of a king may even come from the famous show Games of Thrones. The fight for the throne between the five kingdoms began by the nasty actions of King Joffery, a spoiled, childish, and sadistic king. So it's not very surprising that we don't see Christ as King when we have so many poor examples of what kingship looks like in practice.

Even Jesus knew the oppressive nature of secular kings, and in contrast to them, he connected his role as king to humble service, and commanded his followers to be servants as well. In other passages of Scripture, his kingdom is tied to his suffering and death. While Christ is coming to judge the nations, his teachings spell out a kingdom of justice balanced with radical love, mercy, peace, and forgiveness. When we celebrate Christ as King, we are not celebrating an oppressive ruler, but one willing to die for humanity and whose "loving-kindness endures forever." Christ is the king who gives us true freedom, freedom in Him. Therefore, we must never forget that Christ radically redefined and transformed the concept of kingship.

But we also hear from scripture, the Lord is thy shepherd I shall not want. I chose an affirmation of faith for us to read as a congregation later in the service. But go ahead and look at the words now in your bulletin or on the screen. They say, I need a shepherd because I don't often know the best path even if I pretend to. I rush to dead ends and sometimes my brightest ideas are seamed with darkness. We need both the king and the shepherd. The lord who will lead in power but also steady us when we feel weary or heavy-laden. The Lord who will reign in glory but also who calls us by name and prepares a place for us at the table. We need both the king and the shepherd. Christ is both king and shepherd.

And so, when Pontius Pilate questions Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Christ tells him, "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."

Christ spelled it out very clearly for Pilate. He was born on earth as king from heaven to bring truth and justice to the world.

We are led by a king who doesn't put us down or seek glory only for himself, by a king who calls us by name...a king who wants to be your closest ally, your friend.

So, would you accept God's friend request?

This isn't God, our Lord and Savior who's waiting for you to make the first move. God's already done God's part. He sent his son to this earth to bring salvation for our eternal lives. But if we accept Jesus as more than just our king, if we accept Christ as our friend, our shepherd, we must show him the adoration he deserves. Christ isn't the friend you can bail on at the last minute, or the friend you can ditch for better plans; but even if you do, Christ is waiting with open arms ready to provide forgiveness.

So, would you accept God's friend request?