

## CHRIST THE KING/LECTIONARY 34

November 22, 2009

*Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ*

Daniel 7:9—10, 13—14 Psalm 93 Revelation 1:4b—8 ***John 18:33—37***

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Today is the Festival of Christ the King. It's the final day in our church year, which began last year on the first Sunday of Advent.

Throughout the church year we take a walk through the life of Christ. First, the eager anticipation of the promised Messiah in Advent. Then, his birth at Christmastime and the celebration of this birth. Between Epiphany and the beginning of Lent we enter what's known as “Ordinary Time,” where we begin our look at the life and ministry of Jesus. Ordinary Time starts again after Pentecost. On Ash Wednesday we enter Lent, a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal as we move toward the events of the last week of Jesus' life, his crucifixion, and his triumphant resurrection on Easter morning.

It would seem that after the events of Easter, what's left to be said? Here is the man Jesus, who is crucified, dies, and rises from the dead to become the living Christ. And not only does he rise from the dead, Jesus ascends into heaven. What is left to be said?

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The Feast of Christ the King is not an ancient festival. In fact, it is quite a modern one. It was only created in 1925, by Pope Pius the 11<sup>th</sup>. Why would the Pope *create* a new festival of the church year?

Quite simply, he created it for the very same reasons that it remains relevant for us today. He saw the rising popularity of secularism around the world. He saw that people were placing other things on the throne of their lives, instead of Christ, and decided to do something about it.

Pope Pius the 11<sup>th</sup> set out to remind people that not only did Jesus die on a cross, conquering the power of sin, but that he also rose from the dead, breaking death's grip of all of humanity. But there's even more – he ascended into Heaven. And as the Festival of Christ the King reminds us, it was there that Jesus was crowned King of all creation. HE is the only one worthy of sitting on the throne. Today's festival is intended to remind us of the truth of Jesus' lordship, over all of creation.

In the last verse from today's Gospel reading Jesus said: “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.” In the very next verse, Pontius Pilate asks Jesus, “What is truth?”

If the situation was dire enough in 1925 for the Pope to create this new Festival of Christ the King, in an attempt to counter rising secularism, the situation is critical today. Perhaps echoing these words of Pilate, many people today are also asking, "What is truth?"

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History is best analyzed in hindsight. It's difficult for us to objectively see what's going on, particularly in regard to major cultural movements, when we are yet in the midst of them. For instance, we can now look back at what we call the Age of Reason, which began around the year 1600, and recognize it as an era known for the rise of science and an increasing dependence on observation and rational thought.

Following that was the Age of Enlightenment, from about the mid-1600's to about 1800. The Enlightenment was an age marked by critical questioning of traditional institutions, customs and morals.

Next came the Modern age, which rejected the certainty of Enlightenment thinking. One writer described it this way:

It is in its broadest cultural sense [it is] the assessment of the past as different to the modern age, the recognition that the world was becoming more complex, and that the old “final authorities” (God, government, science, and reason) were subject to intense critical scrutiny.<sup>i</sup>

And finally, we have our current age, referred to as Postmodernism. Since we are yet in this middle of this age it's still uncertain as to when it started, but it probably began in the 1960s. The dominant form of thought during the Postmodern Age? That there no longer is any objective truth.

One author says:

Truth is relative to the community in which a person participates. And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths.<sup>ii</sup>

Another author put it this way:

Since there are multiple descriptions of reality, no one view can be true in an ultimate sense... Since truth is described by language, and all language is created by humans, all truth is created by humans.<sup>iii</sup>

And so this, dear friends, is our dilemma today. Are we to be pulled along with the tide of current thinking, and question along with Pilate, “What is truth?” Or, do we swim against the tide, continuing to boldly proclaim the truth of God in Christ Jesus?

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The church has certainly faced its challenges in the past. In the Age of Reason the challenge was, What proof does anyone have that Jesus rose from the dead, or, in fact, that he ever lived? The Age of Enlightenment reduced religion to a collection of moral rules for living life, that didn't require salvation through Christ. And Postmodernism now says to us that even those few rules for right living are not really rules at all, because there is no universal truth.

Quite frankly, I don't know where all of this Postmodern, relativistic truth is going. More and more lately, I find my mind wandering back to those verses from the Old Testament book of Judges that say, “In those days there was no king in Israel; and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”<sup>iv</sup>

When those words occur in the book of Judges, they are immediately prior to the revelation of the apostasy into which the people had fallen, the people suffering the consequences for their sinful behavior, then God sending someone – called a “judge” – to deliver the people from the consequences of their sinful behavior.

The end of this cycle – turning from God → being subjugated under foreign rulers → repenting and being delivered from the consequences of their sin – which occurs several times in the book of Judges, only comes when the people finally have what they asked for: A king just like all the other nations have.<sup>v</sup> Samuel, the last of the judges, unhappy with this request, prays to God. God says,

Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.<sup>vi</sup>

And so the cycle is broken. And what they get in its place is a monarchy that turns out, with few exceptions, to be every bit as corrupt as the foreign rulers under whom the Israelites had previously struggled.

*(If you want to learn more about this part of the Bible, you might want to consider signing up for my “See Through the Scriptures” class beginning in February.)*

So why recount all of this history? Simple. History has an odd way of repeating itself, particularly when we don't learn from the mistakes of the past.

What is the “king” that will “rule” over us postmoderns? Will we get the “king” that we ask for? Will we go with the flow of postmodern thought, doing “what is right in our own eyes”?

Or, will we declare that there is yet an objective truth in this world? Will we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is, indeed, the Lord of all creation, and re-commit ourselves to following in his ways? This is the truth for which he was born, and the truth, I pray, through which we will live, not only in this life but throughout eternity.

Amen.

<1,486 words>

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- i “Modernism” from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism>, downloaded 11/21/09.
  - ii Stanley J. Grenz, *Primer to Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 14. Quoted in Josh McDowell & Bob Hostetler, *The New Tolerance* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 18.
  - iii Don Closson, “Multiculturalism,” *Probe Perspectives* (Richardson, TX: Probe Ministries, n.d.), 1. Quoted in Josh McDowell & Bob Hostetler, *The New Tolerance* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 18.
  - iv Judges 17:6, 21:25
  - v I Samuel 8:5
  - vi I Samuel 8:7-9