



Christ the King Sunday

November 21, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "Now Thank We All Our God"

Arr. Georg Friederich Kaufmann

Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is the light of the world. We light this candle as a sign that Christ has come and Christ will come again. As the light pushes back darkness let us walk with, learn from, and worship Jesus Christ.

* CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father –

All: To him be glory and power for ever and ever!

Liturgist: "Look he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him."

All: So shall it be! Amen.

Liturgist: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."
Revelation 1:4-8

* **All Singing: 775 "Across the Lands"**

* GOD'S GREETING – *Revelation 1:4*

* GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

* **All Singing: 540 "Holy God We Praise Your Name"**
Singing verses 1, 2, and 4

Children ages 2–7 may come forward for a brief word and blessing before they leave for “God Loves Me” and “Children in Worship.”

CHILDREN’S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also, with you.

Reconciliation

Liturgist: The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty and armed with strength;

All: Indeed, the world is established, firm and secure, and your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.

Liturgist: Your statutes, Lord, stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days.

Psalm 93:1, 2, and 5 adapted

All: Lord in your mercy forgive us for how we fail to follow your ways and seek to be masters of our own lives.

Silent Confession and Reflection

Liturgist: Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions –

All: it is by grace that we’ve been saved.

Liturgist: And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order to show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

All: For it is by grace that we’ve been saved, through faith – and this is not from ourselves, it is a gift of God –

Liturgist: and not by works, so that no one can boast.

All: For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:4-10 adapted

All Singing: 795 “We Know that Christ Is Raised”

BAPTISM OF TRINITY JADE LUCILLE SIMPSON

Minister: Having heard God’s gracious promises to us in Christ, do you desire that Trinity Jade Lucille be baptized?

Parents: We do.

All: With joy we celebrate together the gift of God’s grace in Christ!

Minister: In presenting your child for baptism, desiring that Trinity Jade Lucille be grafted into Christ as a member of his body do you receive the teachings of the Christian faith, which we confess in the Creeds of the church?

Parents: Yes! We trust in him as our Lord and Savior. We intend to be Christ’s faithful disciples, trusting in his promises, obeying his Word, honoring his church, and showing his love, with God’s help as long as we shall live.

Minister: Will the congregation please stand and with these parents proclaim your faith using the words from the Apostle’s Creed.

All: I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

COVENANT VOWS
PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING
BAPTISM

WELCOME

Minister: Some of us will have the privilege of encouraging Trinity Jade Lucille often, over the course of many years. Others of us may not be able to do so. Yet we all speak words of promise and welcome, speaking on behalf of Christ's whole church, in time and space, and committing ourselves to live lives of Christian encouragement wherever God calls us.

Brothers and sisters, we now receive Trinity Jade Lucille into Christ's church. I charge you to nurture and love her and to assist her to be Christ's faithful disciple.

All: With joy and thanksgiving, we now welcome you, Trinity Jade Lucille, into Christ's church; for we are all one in Christ. We promise to love, encourage, and support you and to help you know and follow Christ.

* **All Singing: 796 "Oh, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus"**

Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

All: Prepare our hearts, O God, to hear your Word and obey your will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture: John 18:33-37

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Truth on the Scaffold

* **All Singing: 223 "Crown Him with Many Crowns"**

Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Liturgist: With joy, let us now offer our gifts, in music, heart, and resource, as a sign of our deep devotion and covenant faithfulness.

OFFERING

1. General Fund
2. Denominational Ministry Shares

OFFERTORY

Soloist: "Sing to Jesus"

Fernando Ortega / Rich Nibbe

Come and see, look on this mystery—the Lord of the universe, nailed to a tree. Christ our God, spilling His holy blood, bowing in anguish His sacred head.

Sing to Jesus, Lord of our shame, Lord of our sinful hearts.
He is our great Redeemer. Sing to Jesus; honor His name.
Sing of His faithfulness, pouring His life out unto death.

Come you weary, and He will give you rest.
Come you who mourn, lay on His breast.
Christ who died, risen in paradise; giver of mercy, giver of life.

Sing to Jesus; His is the throne, now and forever. He is the King of heaven.
Sing to Jesus; we are His own, now and forever. Sing for the love our God
has shown.

* **All Singing:** **543 “Now Thank We All Our God”**
Singing verse 3

**All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given, the Son and Spirit blest,
who reign in highest heaven – the one eternal God, whom earth and heaven
adore; for those it was, is now, and shall be evermore.**

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Sending

* BENEDICTION

Postlude: “Crown Him with Many Crowns”

Michael Burkhardt

Worship Leaders

Organist:	Dora Diephouse	Acolyte:	Ben VanderWeele
Pianist / Soloist:	Erin Pacheco	Liturgist:	Dan Diephouse
Vocalist:	Sarah Rinkenberger	Prayer:	Gary R Medema
Percussion:	Clay Carlson		
Prelude Organist:	Yudha Thianto		
Minister:	Roger Nelson		

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)
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Text: John 18: 28-40
Title: Truth on the Scaffold
Date: 11.21.21
Roger Allen Nelson

I found myself in a conversation that I didn't want to have.
As one who is "conflict avoidant" I kept looking for an off-ramp.

My cousin was talking about vaccines as I smiled and nodded my head. He was happy to offer a monologue which eventually veered into claims and conspiracies that strained credibility.

I gently pushed back.

"I don't think that's true..."

And he responded, "You have your information and I have mine."

When our conversation mercifully came to a close, I fired up the Google machine to explore his ideas and try to determine if he was right and I was wrong. I discovered two competing narratives, both positioning themselves as right and reliable. Two different "truths." But while the relationship with my cousin matters more than the details of this debate, there had to be some truth. There had to be right and wrong, true and false. I was reminded of a line from a poem by James Russell Lowell that Martin Luther King Jr. used and that gets quoted frequently in the black church,

Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne...

Dear friends, it feels like truth is on the scaffold.

MIT researchers have determined that false stories are 70% more likely to be forwarded through social media than true stories. But, of course, you can't believe that because you can't believe science, or the media, or universities, or studies.....

I came of age during Watergate; I expect politicians to lie. I grew up watching television; I've been lied to every day of my life. But I still want the truth....

When decisions about public health or policing practices or elections hinge on actual-verifiable-fact, I want the truth. When the news is told, I want the truth. When a politician pontificates or a preacher preaches, I want the truth. You too?

Which is part of what makes this morning's text so engaging and powerful....

Pilate was a civil servant, a mid-level bureaucrat, a cog in the machine.

He was trying to juggle the demands of the clerics, pacify the crowd, and do his duty for Rome when the ruling-religious-right brought him a problem before lunch – only to keep their distance, and wait on the porch, so as not to be soiled.

Jesus, the accused, stood in front of Pilate.

He was either a harmless religious dreamer or a dangerous insurrectionist. He was either a revolutionary who threatened the empire or one more subversive crank who riled up the Jews but posed no problem to power. The Hebrew political/religious establishment described him as a criminal. (The actual word here is "evil-doer")

So, Pilate pokes around with a few questions:

*Are you the king of the Jews?
Your own people handed you over to me. What is it that you have done?*

And, the exchange is going along swimmingly until Jesus mentions the truth.

...the reason I was born and came into this world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

And with that, the whole thing grinds to a halt.

Pilate was fine with the muddled middle where things are fudged for the sake of political expediency. There should be a solution that preserves the status quo; there should be a way to spin this so that all parties could hold their positions of power. Pilate would settle for something that worked. But, the truth?

Pilate didn't know which way to turn.

Criminals offer alibis.

Martyrs make proclamations.

The misguided spin stories.

The innocent protest mightily.

The guilty plead for mercy, but the truth?

That's a category of philosophy.

That's the realm of theologians and poets.

That's in the neighborhood of the ethereal not the real.

There's no place in politics for the truth...

So, Pilate sputters, "What is the truth?"

And, walks away.

Truth is on the scaffold.

Dear friends, each of the four gospels tells the story of Jesus with a particular slant. "Truth" is part of John's slant. The word for "truth" only occurs once in Matthew, it shows up three times each in Mark and Luke, but it appears 25 times in John.

It functions as the qualifier for much of what Jesus says, "Truly I say to you..." It serves as a title, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." It is part of what he prays for his disciples, "Sanctify them by the truth..." And it serves as a summary of his life's mission, "I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth..."

Therefore, what does Jesus mean when he talks about the truth?

I'm with Pilate. "What is truth?"

Last Sunday, in the last sermon of the Hebrews series, the text read,

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up on meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing...

So, I went straight at it. I tried to make a case for returning to consistent in-person worship. After the service, an elder said to me that was “a pitch perfect take on a difficult text.” I replied that it wouldn’t make any difference. People don’t make decisions based on rational or scriptural arguments.

Truth is not always a function of reason, or scientific method, or the meeting of an external standard. People come to truth by feeling and intuition and culture. Music communicates truths that words can’t touch. Love is true and not always the result of rationality. Every of us believe things about ourselves that are powerfully true to us ~ but don’t always match reality. Things that were so clearly true at one point in our lives are no longer true now. And, underneath the things that we hold as true there is a whole host of assumptions or presuppositions. Truth is not always discerned by intellectual discourse. Truth takes all sorts of shapes and comes to us in all sorts of ways.

Pilate’s question is well played. “What is truth?”

It seems worth noting that Jesus doesn’t answer Pilate. He doesn’t offer a definition, talk about God, point to scripture, or quote a creed. Instead, Jesus leaves the question open, without protest is swapped for Barabbas, and in the next scene he is mocked, beaten, and whipped. In response to Pilate’s question about truth, Jesus turns toward the cross.

Dear friends, maybe Jesus answers Pilate’s question about truth by what he does. Rather than answer Pilate with claims about transcendence, or propositional truth, or verifiable doctrine, Jesus embodies truth in what comes next. And, this is what truth looks like: Non-violent,
forgiving,
suffering,
self-emptying,
crucified....

N.T. Wright in reflecting on this text offers this insight:

We have often read John 18 to be saying, my kingdom is not of this world meaning my kingdom simply belongs to somewhere else called heaven. It’s not what the Greek says, actually. It says, my kingdom is not from, or out of, this world. It is not characterized by the mechanisms and the power plays of this world. But, my goodness, my kingdom is for this world.... Jesus’ kingship is all about a different way of power, a different way of life, within this present world.

Or to put it a different way....

Truth is a different way of power,
a different way of life,
a different way of being,
within this present world.

Truth is a criminal-king nailed to the torture apparatus of the empire.

The remarkable-overwhelmingly-absurd claim of the gospels is that in Jesus of Nazareth the fullness of God and the fullness of humanity dwell. Jesus is truth incarnate. So, if truth is on the scaffold the response that Jesus offers is not a doctrinal system, a set of principles, or a collection of laws, but Divine Love embodied unto death.

Embodied truth.

This morning we baptized Trinity Jade Lucille into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. She is signed and sealed as a child of the covenant. Our calling is to embody the love and grace of Jesus Christ that she might live into that reality. Our calling is to help her become who she already is....

What she can't apprehend by reason she can get a sense of through relationship. What she can't settle in mind may come through her heart.

Toward the end of his memoir *Telling Secrets*, Fredrick Buechner writes,

I have bumbled my way into at least the outer suburbs of the Truth that can never be told but only come upon, that can never be proved but only lived for and loved.

I am not suggesting that there isn't a place for rationality and confessional creeds that name eternal truths, but it seems to me that truth is often best "lived for and loved." Sometimes the closest we get to truth is through relationship. So, while we may live in an age where truth is on the scaffold, whatever we know of truth is what is "lived for and loved."

For empires will rise and fall,
presidents and kings will come and go,
theologies and theories will pass,
politics will crumble,
and truth will be relative,
but our trust is in an embodied truth ~ crucified, dead, and resurrected.

Let us live for and love him.
Amen.