

### **John 18:33-37**

*Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews. Jesus replies that his kingdom is not of this world. When Pilate seeks to confirm that he is a king, Jesus cryptically replies that it is Pilate who says so, but that he came into the world to testify to the truth.*

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.'

John continues the running theme, introduced in Ch 1, of Jesus' kingship incarnate in human flesh: "And the Word became flesh..." (1:14). This conversation between Jesus and Pilate takes place, significantly, in a palace. Here Jesus makes it clear that the concept of kingship and kingdom did not require physical force in order to establish its power (v36). Pilate most probably uses the term 'king' to show contempt for the Jews. Truth is embodied in Jesus Christ and is not something that can be proved. Truth is "the Word became flesh" (1:14). Worldly kings take power from others by winning battles or at least through successful diplomacy. Jesus neither fights nor allows his followers to do so. He does not mount a vigorous defence. Instead, Jesus offers an alternative to earthly kingship. "I have been born and come into the world for this: to witness to the truth" (John 18:38). Jesus' testimony to the truth appears embedded within the story of John's Gospel. In chapter 19, the manner of Jesus' death testifies to his true identity. Those who can hear or see the message of Jesus' crucifixion see a true king.

### **67B Readings**

The Reign of God has always been a central focus of the worship of God's people. From the time of the promise to David of an eternal dynasty, the vision of the Reign of God's Monarch has been the hope of God's people. Yet, the challenge has always been to understand God's Reign as of a completely different order from human power systems. In Samuel and in Psalm 132, the "descendant of David" is contrasted with godless people whose lives are wasted, and is associated with worship and God's presence. In Revelation this one is seen as Jesus, who is revealed in glory, and whose sacrifice is seen as the primary act in bringing God's Reign into the world. Finally, in the encounter between Jesus and Pilate, the difference between human rulership and God's Reign is starkly shown, as Jesus explains that he claims no human kingship, but is the king of a realm that is not of this world. It is a kingdom of truth and justice. The challenge of this week's celebration is to avoid triumphalism. We are not to make God's Reign out to be the same as human power systems, only stronger, more dominant, and longer lasting. Rather, we are to recognise God's Reign in acts of compassion and justice, in service and sacrifice, and in the challenge to human systems to give up their obsession with war and conquest in order to build a world of peace and love for all. The celebration of Christ the King raises two issues for us as followers of Christ:

1. The issue of authority: Jesus cannot be followed while retaining our own agendas. As we follow Christ, we are called to embrace His agenda. In our striving for justice, equity and a better world, there remains the need to proclaim the eternal kingdom of God, and to call people, leaders and communities to faith and to submission to the authority and priorities of Christ (which is not the same thing as the Church).
2. The issue of the nature of God's Reign: The glory of God is revealed not in conquest or power-over, but in sacrifice and service. God's Reign is not "of this world" – it is a completely different reality that exists within, and subverts, the power systems of the world. Therefore, in our quest for justice, we must be careful not to get drawn into competitive power games in which only some can win, while others lose. Rather, we need to constantly hold ourselves faithful to the service and sacrifice of Christ, to the welcome and inclusivity of Christ, and to the love of Christ for all – even our enemies.

(Source: John van de Laar, *Sacredise*)

**Psalm 132:1-12** *A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem*

*A Psalm in remembrance of David's quest to build a Temple for God, God's promise to David of an eternal dynasty, and God's choice of Jerusalem as God's "home". The Psalm recounts some of the history of the ark coming to Jerusalem, with Jaar and Ephrathah (v. 6). The psalm seeks the Lord's continued attention to David and his covenant. This psalm looks back to the historic David and anticipates a new descendant for David. As such it complements both the last words of David read today and the anticipation of the reign of Christ, David's descendant according to the Gospels.*

LORD, remember David and all that he suffered.

**He made a solemn promise to the LORD.**

He vowed to the Mighty One of Israel,

"I will not go home; I will not let myself rest. I will not let my eyes sleep nor close my eyelids in slumber until I find a place to build a house for the LORD, sanctuary for the Mighty One of Israel."

We heard that the Ark was in Ephrathah;

then we found it in the distant countryside of Jaar.

**Let us go to the sanctuary of the LORD;**

**let us worship at the footstool of his throne.**

Rise up, O Lord, and come to your resting place,  
you and the ark of your might.

**Let your ministers be clothed with righteousness,  
and your faithful shout for joy.**

Let us worship the Lord. For the sake of your servant David,  
do not reject the king you have anointed.

The LORD swore an oath to David

with a promise he will never take back:

**"I will place one of your descendants on your throne. If your  
descendants obey the terms of my covenant and the laws  
that I teach them, then your royal line will continue forever and  
ever."**

**2 Samuel 23:1-7**

*David's last words, celebrating the beauty of the one who rules righteously, and remembering God's covenant with David and his family. This is all in contrast with godless people whose lives are wasted.*

Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favourite of the Strong One of Israel: The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire? But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away; for they cannot be picked up with the hand; to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear. And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

**Revelation 1:4b-8**

*Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the first to rise from death, and the ruler of all kings. He has freed us by shedding his blood and has made us a kingdom of priests. He is the beginning and the end, and will be seen by all people when he comes with the clouds of heaven.*

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.