

1. Who is your king?

What would you answer when people would ask you who your king is?' Maybe you'd say: It is Willem Alexander. Or: I don't have a king, I am British, we have Elisabeth as our queen. Or: I don't do kings or queens. All reasonable answers, but who of us would give the best possible answer: He is called Jesus, my King, my Savior, my Lord...

This Sunday is the last Sunday of the liturgic year, from next Sunday onward we celebrate Advent, the coming of the Savior of the world. This last Sunday of the year is called 'Christ the King.' We worship Jesus as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Most of us would, when asked 'who is your king', mention the current king or queen, rather than King Jesus. That shows at least partly that we are not really used to the idea of Jesus being the King of our lives. We feel at home in this world, and are probably not a 100 % focused on the Kingdom of God. We might have not fully integrated the idea of being servants of the King most high.

Jesus himself conveys the idea of his Kingdom to Pilate. Pilate is questioning Jesus in his headquarters. It is the trial before the crucifixion, and even people who have never been to court can see that this trial is not legit. The question 'what have you done' indicates what a strange trial it was; the accused was supposed

to talk instead of the accuser pressing charges against him. The Jews who handed Jesus over to Pilate might have told him about Jesus' triumphal entry, where He was hailed as the Son of David. Pilate asks him: are you the King of the Jews? And Jesus answers: *My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews...* But for this purpose, I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world, to bear witness of the truth. Everyone who is of the truth, listens to my voice.

Pilate doesn't bother about hearing the answer to the question he poses: what is the truth... Neither does he listen well to Jesus' explanation. The Lord talks about his Kingdom as not being of this world. He is obviously the King. He has servants. He as a leader is influencing people with the truth. And everyone who is of the truth listens to Jesus' voice. So He is King, but a strange King. With a Kingdom from another realm which obviously has influence in our physical world.

2. Two kingdoms

Earlier in John, chapter 8, Jesus talked about two sets of kingdoms. There are two kind of people connected to those two different kingdoms: there are people who know God and have been freed by the truth, and other people who live under the influence of the power of darkness.

We have no problems with the disciples being servants of the King most high. And the church being the place where King Jesus is honored. The Kingdom is about Jesus Christ. He is our King and we worship Him. We learn from Jesus as He teaches us the rules of his Kingdom and shares the do's and don'ts in the Sermon on the mount and in other teachings. We gladly acknowledge that through his death and resurrection, eternal life is granted to all who believe and follow him. He gives us access to the Kingdom of God, with as central rule loving God and loving one another. We believe that his Kingdom is already present in this age and hope for the Kingdom of God to come in all its fulness. We gladly believe all this and express that faith every Sunday.

But do we think that there is a realm of darkness as well? Don't we think that people are essentially good and do their utmost to please others? The answer John gives is a clear 'no.' Jesus was almost stoned to death when He talked about it! It seems that around us, the same answer is given. I fly quite a lot and saw 'Wonder woman' in the plane. There's a lot of fighting going on in this superhero spectacle. The final observation is that there is a lot of evil in this world, and that we need a savior... In literature, you find the same idea. Triggered by another sermon, I read a book this week, written by Albert Camus, called 'The Fall.' The main character in 'The Fall' is a lawyer, Jean Baptist Clemens. He is sitting in a bar in Amsterdam and starts sharing about all his good deeds. He is what you would call a good person. He helps the poor, works pro bono as

a lawyer, even helps blind people crossing the streets and donates from his income to charities. Jean Baptist argues that he is truly good, he is not a pharisee as some people are. But then, halfway the story, he finds himself on a bridge in Paris. And as he walks there, he sees a woman, staring at the water. He passes her and as he continues his walk, he hears her jump. He hears the scream and the splash. And he hesitates. Does he go back to rescue her? He knows all the dangers, and -as a lawyer- the implications of failing to help people and the accusations of all sorts attached to that. He doesn't help. But he himself realizes that he refuses to help because in his heart of hearts, he is indifferent. He doesn't really care. And from that moment onward, his good life deteriorates. All his goodness and compassion seem to disappear, and he indulges in what we would call sin. At several moments in the book there is laughter. A strange, accusing, hunting laugh. He hears it at the end of the story, again on a bridge, and when he turns around there is no one to be seen.

Camus says two things: there is no one who is good. We all fail. It is called 'The fall' for a reason... And secondly: there is a larger framework. There is a greater battle of good and evil and John Baptist Clemens felt that he was under the influence of someone of something evil. Something that had him by the throat. Camus says: there is not such a thing as a good person. We have our dark sides and, moreover, there is the dark side that influences us.

If that is true, then all of us needs to be freed from both the sin that poisons us, and the power of evil that haunts us.

We need a Savior. We need a King that sets us free. Jesus talks in his final moments before the crucifixion about his Kingdom and about the truth that sets free.

3. Jesus, the Truth

In John, we read Jesus is the King of kings. But His kingship is different from other kings and kingdoms. He Himself describes it as 'not of this world.' At the same time, we understand that it has everything to do with this world as he talks about servants, about truth, and even about the ultimate purpose of His life: to bear witness of the truth. That is the very reason He came into this world.

The word 'truth' is used by John throughout his gospel. Truth is used in sharp contrast to the word 'lie.' Satan is the deceiver from the beginning, but Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

It is not that this world is bad as such. John talks about the creation in a very positive way, he even starts his gospel the way Genesis starts: with God being the Creator of the whole Cosmos.

In the whole of the gospel, the truth of the salvation God brings in Jesus is contrasted to sin, satan an death. And John says: each person has to be born again. Everybody has to be born again, to be able to enter the Kingdom of God. It is through trusting in

Jesus that we are born again. He is the true vine, the true bread of life, the true light, he himself is the Truth. That is the answer Pilate missed, by walking away.

The way He bears witness to the truth is described in the other work of John we read from, the book of Revelation. John greets his readers and wishes us grace and peace from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness. The word witness here is martyr (martyr in Greek). Jesus way of witnessing of the truth is by dying on the cross, by becoming a martyr.

Now, one would think that becoming a martyr is losing the fight. One would think that the one who dies, automatically loses the battle. But that is not true. The crucifixion of Jesus is not a narrative of a defeat, it is the story of a Conqueror. This is how He wins the battle against sin and Satan. This is where He defeats the powers.

Satan thought that this was his final victory. But it was the other way around. Jesus gave himself and on the cross, he won the fight against sin and evil. Jesus, being pure and good, being God in the flesh, died for people like you and me. People with sins. People under the influence of the evil one. People who had no way out of their misery. People like John Baptist Clemens, who know their mistakes but still think high of themselves, and then hear the evil one laughing at them. People who are bound in fear. And Jesus does what we never could do. He lived a life free from the power of Satan, free from sin, a life of love, of light, of truth. The very life we should have.

And He changes his pure and perfect life for ours. He suffers on the cross under the weight of our sins, and thus, as the Lamb of God, He takes away the sin of the world. He conquers satan and death and sin on the cross. It is not His defeat. It is His victory. And we and everyone who beliefs in Him, is freed of the yoke of the devil and made servant of the God most high.

The only thing that is needed to be free is to go to Jesus, confess your sins, and receive full forgiveness. To not harden our heart. And by doing that, the Lord frees us from all our sins.

In Revelation, John describes it as follows: He loves us, and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a Kingdom, priest to his God and Father.

That is a comforting word to end with. Did you hear that well?

He loves us (present tense)

And has freed us from our sins by His blood (past tense)

We are being loved. We are free. Jesus is our King.

Let us live by grace, as servants of king Jesus!

Amen.