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Christ the King
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John 18:33-38

Signs of Change

Intro: Our reading this morning tells of Jesus' encounter with Pilate. It will be the day of his crucifixion. When Pilate asks Jesus "are you a king?" he couldn't understand the answer Jesus gave, Let us listen for God's word to us.

God created humankind and with Jesus Christ invites us to share the Joy of the Holy Spirit. Community Presbyterian Church will embody that vision and all members, regular attenders and visitors will experience the full Joy and excitement of living in the Spirit. Our vision sees a congregation of diversity acting as a single body sharing its joys and mutually supporting each other in times of trial. It sees the congregation as a family giving each other caring guidance and support in pursuit of the Joy of the Spirit.

Our Joy will be evident in four major areas: worship, education, growth, and outreach.. CPC enjoys high quality worship services including stimulating sermons and a palpable level of excitement about the service. Services express honor, reverence, glory, and thanks to God. The services include music leadership from a choir or small group at every service and a bell choir

or other chamber music at every service. The congregational singing includes uplifting and easy to sing songs and all people enjoy singing during the service. CPC's congregation hungers to learn and share God's guidelines for living in the Joy of the Spirit. Adults in the congregation are eager to share with children and youth their experiences and knowledge of how to live in the Joy of the Spirit.

CPC's Sunday school program is staffed with well-trained and well-organized volunteers. Volunteers are full of Joy and excitement for the task they have undertaken. Volunteers enjoy the full support of the staff and membership of CPC. All adult members of CPC are eager to assist with the Sunday school program whenever possible. CPC's youth enjoy outreach opportunities, youth worship services and chances to explore their beliefs

and values. The youth are an active, visible part of the congregation.

CPC's adult education program includes many exciting and thought provoking opportunities on Sunday and throughout the week. A full sanctuary greets all attendees at CPC every Sunday. Every person entering the church is welcomed eagerly by old and new friends after a week away. Visitors recognize CPC as a place where individuals are accepted and valued and as a place where relationships are valued and fostered. A formalized group of congregational members meet this need. Individuals designated to be at each service greet visitors and assist them in becoming integrated into life the body.

CPC experiences the Joy of helping fill the needs of others in the community and the world at large. CPCers eagerly spread the word about the Joy of the Spirit. Members are excited to belong to CPC because of the high level of involvement in community activities. CPC is known in the community as a congregation full of Joy and energy to serve others.

As a diverse organization acting as a single body, individual members of the body bring different interests, talents, and levels of involvement. The organization recognizes each for his or her abilities and works to integrate all into the work of the body.

The church organization places greater emphasis on the work that needs to be accomplished than on committee membership. The Session, Deacons and Trustees are small boards. Board members

utilize the talents of volunteers to accomplish their work.

Ministry groups rather than ministry committees oversee much of the outreach of the church. Each ministry group consists of one or two leaders who organize a group of volunteers to ensure that the goals of the church are accomplished. The organization encourages all members to experience the Joy of outreach.

You know this as CPC's vision statement. Is it true? These words, do they describe Community Presbyterian? Does this vision fit the real world of Grand Rapids, or is it a pretty picture that does not exist and no one really believes ever will? Each time we baptize a child in this place we promise to be there as a community of faith for that person, as a community that holds fast to the vision that Jesus sets forth. We promise to teach that child about a world that is different vastly than the status quo. The things we say about a different reality, the things we will say to every child about Jesus? Are they true?

In our scripture this morning, there is no way to overstate the power and drama in this moment as Jesus came before Pilate. And Pilate asks what is truth? Jesus knew what was going to happen, he knew how the world was about to change. Pilate did not. Here are two men with some things in common, and one huge difference. They were both about the same age, both of them passionate, committed, opinionated about what they believed. I imagine each of them could be described as bullheaded at times,

even by their friends. They were both quite intelligent. All these things one could suppose they shared in common. The thing that divided them so far apart, was how they thought. They lived in different realities or perhaps we should say they walked in different worlds.

Jesus was a Jew. Pilate was a Roman. And Pilate never understood the Jews. That must have driven him nuts. He was sent on assignment to Judea to be the over seer of the Roman occupation and he had to deal with such different culture. As a Roman he prized reason and logic, straight forward questions with straight forward answers.

The Jews however, would answer questions with stories, or worse yet even more questions. Think of how Jesus would often teach in parables and how wide open parables are to varying interpretations. The scribes brought Jesus before Pilate without really answering the question of "what has he done wrong". They bring Jesus forward and say "kill him, he is blaspheming."

Jesus is brought before Pilate, and Pilate wants to do what is appropriate and necessary. Although Jewish life was seen as having little or no value, he did not want to order an execution with no reason. Blasphemy was not a Roman crime. But Pilate listens to the voices in that crowd coming from those who claimed to follow God, he listened to ones that said they have no king but Caesar, the voices that accept the status quo. The Pilate gives in to the demands that this Jesus with crazy visions

would lead to ruin, so he must be done away with.

The high priests accuse Jesus of leading a revolt against the emperor in Rome. They said Jesus claimed to be a King. Now when it came to Kings and emperors. Pilate knew about those. And if Jesus was leading a revolt - that would be a crime. But this man did not act like a king or revolutionary. Jesus was not a convincing King in the way that one was used to thinking about kings. So Pilate asks Jesus directly. "Are you? Are you the king of the Jews? Jesus replies "my Kingdom is not of this world."

He wasn't saying that it was a kingdom off in the clouds somewhere, a kingdom literally "out of this world." Jesus went on to elaborate the kinds of kingdoms that Pilate knew all about. Ones that depend on raw power, that are maintained by force.

If Jesus were an earthly king his followers would have fought to protect him. In fact, Peter had just tried to do that in the garden. But Jesus told him to put away his sword. The kingdom he belonged to was different.

In that circular, poetic style of his, Jesus was telling Pilate "The kingdom I belong to is not like the kingdoms of this world. It's not even a kingdom as humans usually understand kingdoms.

As long as we think about the kingdom of God in a geographical or territorial way, as we think about the Roman Empire or the country of the United States, we're always

going to think of God's kingdom as being somewhere or sometime.

But Jesus said, "my kingdom is not of this world. If it is not somewhere what can it be? Every king we know has a kingdom. Whether it is the king of England, the ring of rock and roll, even the lion king had a particular time and place that defined the kingdom.

Jesus was at the day of his death. Throughout his whole life he knew, he believed, that in him the kingdom had come. Jesus lived on earth, but he lived as no one else ever has, in God's kingdom. Everything he did, and said and lived, he revealed the love, the influence and the grace of God.

Pilate asks "what is truth" Jesus lived the answer. God's kingdom exists in people and God's Kingdom is most visible in him. If we can stop thinking of the Kingdom as somewhere, or sometime, and start thinking of it as someone, a whole lot of what Jesus said will make a lot more sense. If we can get beyond our seeking logical reasoned answers, if we can turn off our "auto-pilots" that guide us through a cause and effect universe. Then we can begin to see the truth is not "an idea with merit." Truth is felt, it is acted out and enacted in life. Truth in Hebrew means more literally "trustworthy" or "faithful" and it is a term more descriptive of a person than any intellectual proposition.

Pilate asks what is truth, what is trustworthy. Jesus' words are describing

who is truth. Earlier in the Gospel Jesus says "I am the way the truth and the life."

In his institutes on religion, John Calvin reminds us "To see the kingdom of God is to inherit it... But those who identify the kingdom of God with heaven are mistaken; the kingdom means rather the spiritual life, which begins in this life by faith, and in which we grow daily as we progress in constant faith.

This weekend as we have shared tables of thanksgiving, let us be thankful not for all the things in our lives, but all the blessing, all the signs of the Kingdom that come to us through people and relationships. Of all our relationships may we claim Christ as King, the one who does have claim to the whole of our lives. Amen