

Last Sunday of the Church Year / November 24, 2024

John 18:36

*"My kingdom is not of this world."*

Today is the Last Sunday of the Church year. The last Sunday of the church year reminds us that the world's calendar and the church's calendar are not the same. Christ's kingdom is not of the world, but it is in the world. The church's calendar and the world's calendar have a different beginning, a different ending and a different purpose. The world's calendar revolves around the sun. It is solar calendar. It spins in a circle forever. The church's calendar revolves around the Son, Jesus Christ. It is a Christ centered calendar. It begins with the coming of Jesus into the world, Advent. It concludes with the promise of Jesus' return to renew the creation and to establish His eternal kingdom in the world. It cycles like the solar calendar, but it leads to a destination; Christ and His eternal kingdom.

The church calendar leads us through the scriptures in the course of the year. The church calendar leads us to Jesus through the words of scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit spoken through Moses, the prophets, the evangelists, embodied fully in Jesus, the Word who became flesh to dwell among us. The world's calendars repeat annually going nowhere forever. The church's calendar leads us to Jesus through the scriptures and reminds us of the terminus of our faith; the presence of God in a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Jesus' kingdom and the kingdoms of the world are contrasted throughout the gospel of John and in our reading this last Sunday of the Church year. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate, representing the kingdoms of the world, stands to interrogate and judge Jesus and the kingdom of God, of which He is the Son and heir. Pilate rules with law, threat and force. At one point he reminds Jesus he has authority to release or crucify Him. Jesus reminds Pilate that he would have no authority if it were not given from above. Authority is a God given responsibility. All who exercise authority will give an account to God. Nevertheless, Jesus assures Pilate that He is no threat to his authority. His kingdom is not of the world. Jesus' kingdom is of Spirit. Jesus'

kingdom is the righteous reign of God in the world, beginning in the hearts of those who believe. Jesus' kingdom comes not through force and arms, but by the power of His word. Jesus calls through His word and leads those who follow with His word.

The Roman governor demands to know if Jesus is a king. That was his responsibility as governor. He wants to determine if Jesus is a threat to the Roman Kingdom. Jesus affirms that He is a king, but He assures Pilate that He is no threat to Rome. He says, "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" Jesus did not come to challenge the kingdoms and rulers of the world. They are appointed by God and have a responsibility to God separate from Him and His kingdom. Jesus' kingdom is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is His righteous reign in the hearts of people who hear His words and believe in Jesus' name.

Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. He is the only way to the Father. He opened the way to the Father through the sacrifice of His blood on the cross, by which He atoned for the sin of the world. He removed the barrier of sin that separated humanity from the Father. The tearing of the temple curtain when Jesus' died was a sign His sacrifice atoned for the world's sin. Jesus' kingdom is not of the world, but it is in the world in the hearts of those who hear His words and believe in His name.

The kingdom of God is to live with the Father in peace. Jesus brings us to the Father in peace through faith in His Name and baptism into His death and resurrection. Jesus transfers us from the darkness of the world in bondage to sin, under the dominion of the devil and condemnation of death into the light of eternal life. We sing, Blessed be our Lord and Saviour Jesus who has transferred us from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His Father. Believers come from every nation, tribe and kingdom on the earth, but In Christ we are members of the Kingdom of God. Regardless of our nationhood in the world, in Christ we are citizens of heaven.

In the world, kingdom refers to political authority over a territory, a group of people in that territory, or a group of people in a non-geographic area. Political authority may derive from the people as in a

democracy, or may be imposed on people by force, as in a dictatorship. Whether derived from the group or imposed on the group, political authority is exercised through law and maintained by force through the coercive use of the law. God doesn't coerce people into His kingdom through law. God uses law to open our eyes to see our sin. His gospel opens our hearts to receive Jesus as our Saviour. Having in this way established His reign in our hearts, He leads us along paths of righteousness through His Spirit who dwells within us.

The world as expressed by St. John, is the spiritual nature of human beings separated from God by sin, hostile to Him in action and in attitude. In Ephesians St. Paul wrote of the spiritual nature of those born into the world, saying, "*And you were dead in the transgressions and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air...and were by nature children of wrath.*" The world is by nature self-seeking, seeking to exert control on its environment, whether that is a kingdom, a household or a relationship. We want the controls. We want to be in control. Through His word Jesus calls us out of the world of sin and death into the kingdom of His grace, in which He forgives our sins, heals our wounds and leads us in paths of peace.

The world values things that can be seen, touched and exploited materially and physically for our benefit. The world believes what it sees. The spirit of the world dwells also in the hearts of believers. When told that Christ had risen, the apostle Thomas refused to believe until he saw with his eyes and touched with his hands, Jesus risen from the dead. When he saw he believed. Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*" St. John wrote, "*These things are written that you may believe Jesus is the Christ that believing you may have life in His name.*" God values above all else faith in His promises, especially the promises of forgiveness and life in Christ.

In the world, order is maintained by rules, laws and commands; all of which are enforced by outward coercion. The Ruler is the one who has the most force. When asked about the influence of the church on the affairs of the world, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev responded mockingly, "How many divisions does the church have?" The kingdoms of the world have armies, divisions, weapons and death.

God has His word. His word is power! Rome's kingdom is gone. Jesus' kingdom endures. God said to Isaiah, "*My word is a hammer.*" God's word is effective! He said, "*The word that does forth from my mouth will not return to me empty. It will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*" God's desire is human salvation. God's purpose is that through the hearing of the word our hearts may be opened to faith that we would receive Christ as our Saviour and abide in Him.

Jesus makes God known in Himself by His word and the wonders He performed; healing the sick, restoring fullness of mobility to the disabled and calling the dead to return to life. The world responded by identifying Him as a threat to their position, rule and authority. The chief priests determined to kill Him. The Roman governor ordered His execution. That's the way the kingdoms of the world operate. Jesus is a different king and He rules a different kingdom. From the cross Jesus prayed the Father to forgive them. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of forgiveness and life. We enter His kingdom through faith in Christ and baptism into His death and resurrection. Jesus' kingdom is not of the world, but it is in the world. The church is the kingdom of Christ in the world. The church is in the world to proclaim the truth of Jesus as its Saviour, to call people from the darkness of sin and death into the light of life through faith in Him.

Through the word of Jesus, God calls people from the darkness of sin and death into the light of forgiveness and life. The kingdom of God begins in the human heart with faith in Jesus and spreads through the world through faith in Jesus. Jesus is the truth. He speaks God's word in purity and truth. He is God's word in human flesh. His word shows us our spiritual alienation from God through sin. HE calls us to Himself in forgiveness that we may live with Him and each other in His peace. Christ's kingdom is not of the world, but it is in the world through the church that embodies and proclaims His word. When Christ returns the world as we know it will pass away. The kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of Christ. In the meantime, we remember our eternal citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven. We remember we are in the world to proclaim the truth of Jesus and to call others to faith in Him through the hearing of His word and baptism into His death and

resurrection. God keep us in His grace until the kingdom of Christ comes in the fulness of glory. In Jesus' Name.