

Over many years, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks have performed various version of a comedy skit called "The 2000-Year-Old Man." In the skit, Reiner interviews Brooks, who is the old gentleman. There are many funny lines as this 2000-year-old man recounts his adventures. At one point, Reiner asks the old man, "Did you always believe in the Lord?" "No. We had a guy in our village named Phil, and for a time we worshipped him." "You worshipped a guy named Phil? Why?" "Because he was big, and mean, and he could break you in two with his bare hands." "Did you have prayers?" "Yes, would you like to hear one? O Phil, please don't be mean and hurt us, or break us in two with your bare hands." "So when did you start worshipping the Lord?" "Well, one day a big thunderstorm came up and a lightning bolt hit Phil. We gathered around and saw that he was dead. Then we said to one another, 'There's somethin' bigger than Phil!'"

"There is somethin' bigger than Phil", this is in brief, the meaning and the message of this Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, "there is somethin' bigger than Phil." There is somethin' bigger than me. There is somethin' bigger than you. There is somethin' bigger than all of us put together.

In today's Gospel reading from John 18, we hear the efforts of Pilate, the imperial governor of Judea, as he tries to get at the truth about Jesus. Ultimately, Pilate will fail in his quest because he focuses his questions only on one level, the wrong level. Pilate needs to and wants to know who Jesus is in terms of the powers and authorities of this world, but the truth that motivates Jesus is on a different level all together.

Pilate represents a system, a way of living and being built upon and maintained by military and legislative violence and coercion, that relied upon the exercise of raw power. Pilate asks his questions of Jesus in the praetorium, the palace, a place of imperial splendor designed to impress and over-impress anyone who enters it with the might of Rome. It is in this setting that Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

The one who stands before Pilate, Jesus, is not the master of the praetorium but its prisoner. Nevertheless Jesus is indeed king, but Pilate will never know it or see it ..... until its too late.

Jesus as king reigns not through working violence but through bearing violence. Jesus as king rules not through coercion but through willingly being the victim of coercion.

Jesus as king rules not through causing suffering but through bearing suffering

Jesus as king rules not through fear but through love, that casts out all fear.

Jesus as king specializes in work, not in the capital city, not in the seats of power and prestige, but in seemingly little, seemingly insignificant, seemingly out of the way places like Bethlehem and Nazareth. In such seemingly insignificant places such as in Project Hope, and the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen, in the emergency shelters of Rock Hill, Jesus the king continues to work, and as a result such places have huge significance!

Jesus as king prefers to work, not with those whom the world regards as powerful, but rather with those whom the world regards as little and insignificant, people like those us gathered here in church

this morning, people who will be touched by the proceeds and the thoughts engendered by the Alternative Gift Fair.

Jesus as king, is most the king from and on a cross, the place where life truly begins, where the life of God embraces the life of all humanity.

Jesus as king brings a very different definition of king, rule, reign, and power. This definition is very different because it expresses the nature and the activity of the true, living God rather than our false gods and their ways.

Pilate speaks from the praetorium and the place, Jesus as king speaks from the manger, the workshop, the cross, the grave, beyond the grave. Jesus is a “king” who, before He stands before Pilate, bloodied and beaten, soon to be flogged and crucified, and whose only “throne” would be a cross, whose followers are no more than the poor and the wretched of the earth.

These two people, these two figures Pilate and Jesus present us with a contrast and a choice between fear and faith. Pastor, preacher and hymn writer, Harry Emerson Fosdick, once wrote:

“Fear imprisons, faith liberates;  
fear paralyzes, faith empowers;  
fear disheartens, faith encourages;  
fear sickens, faith heals;  
fear makes useless, faith makes serviceable—  
and, most of all,  
fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life, while faith  
rejoices in its God.”

Jesus talks and acts out of and as an expression of the Kingdom of God. Although Jesus never offers one final, definitive definition of the kingdom, Jesus does illustrate the Kingdom in countless ways. In the many parables of the kingdom – in which sometimes slowly and sometimes suddenly the Kingdom appears, Jesus points to the Kingdom and its meaning.

In Jesus’ actions and attitudes, Jesus’ welcoming the lost and least and all the lost and the least, the ways Jesus reaches out to others in love and faith, offering wholeness and healing we see the kingdom of God, the kingdom not of fear but the kingdom of faith.

Jesus brought about the Kingdom by touching a leper, as befriending a child, including a woman, dining with “sinners”, when responding to the plea of a Roman soldier, when giving sight to the blind, offering freedom to the imprisoned, when healing the lame and the troubled.

In Jesus, the King, the rule and the reign, the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, but its completion in all its fullness is yet to come. The Kingdom, the reign of God is larger and more comprehensive than the church, but the church is an indispensable means toward the purposes and priorities of the Kingdom.

Jesus as king invites all of us to share God’s kingdom purposes in the world.

Jesus as king calls us to live in ways that demonstrate that we are living as citizens not of this world but of God's Kingdom.

Jesus as king offers Himself to all people, offering the promise that we can be brought to wholeness and can discover healing for dis-ease of any kind as we allow ourselves to rest in the knowledge and experience of the amazing healing, life-altering, life-changing love that God has for us in Jesus Christ.

Already in this Service of Worship we have seen a number of ways in which God mediates that love to us, in the invitation to worship, in the opportunity to pray, in the invitation to confession, in the assurance of God's pardon, in the reading and proclaiming of God's Word, the offer of wholeness and healing has been present.

Location, location, location – the mantra of the realtor.

Location, location, location – though and because he speaks from the praetorium, Pilate represents the forces of disorder and death in our world.

Location, location, location – though and because Jesus speaks to us from the manger, and the workshop, and the cross and the grave and beyond the grave Jesus offers and invites faith not fear; life not death; life today, life in all its fullness, life now and life forever. It is our calling and our joy as Christian people to receive, to share, to offer faith and life to and for each other and to all people everywhere. As we have received we give, as we have been loved we love, as we have been blessed we bless, in the Kingdom of Jesus the King, this is our role and our joy.

There is, my friends, something bigger than Phil, bigger than the vaunted claims of this world, more lasting than the stones of any Temple, greater than all the pain and hurt and misery in this world. There is the Lord, Jesus the Lord of Life and Love, this is the Lord who holds us close, who cherishes us, who sends us forth to live for our King - offering, giving, sharing; offering, giving, sharing life and love and hope and peace. Offering, giving, sharing in the name of and after the example of Jesus Christ our Lord. Let this be our attitude in how we relate to one another and towards all our neighbors. Let this be our calling this Thanksgiving and as we prepare to enter into the Season of Advent. Let us be the people of Jesus, the King, the King who reigns in love. Amen.