

John 18:33-37. ³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" ³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" ³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." ³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

What side are you on?

- 1. We are brought to his side through the truth**
- 2. We stand by his side as we listen to the truth**
- 3. We will stand at his side in glory; that is the truth.**

On Tuesday it will three weeks now since Election Day. It has been almost three weeks since a majority of Minnesota voters declined to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman. To tell you the truth, I was a more than a little bit 'bummed out' and disappointed on November 7 when I heard the final result of the vote. Now after three weeks have gone by it is easy to see that the issue is certainly not forgotten. A lot of people are still talking about the marriage amendment that was voted down and are now wondering what is next for marriage.

Visiting with out-of-state relatives over the Thanksgiving weekend somehow we managed to drag the issue out into conversation. Perhaps you even had the same kind of experience at the family get together as small talk about what's new and recent happenings led to a similar conversation. Maybe a brother-in-law or cousin or some other relative asked you, "*What do you think about that whole amendment vote?*" "*What side were you on?*" You quickly revisit the original emotions of disappointment along with some anger, and now even a tinge of embarrassment and you answer, "*Well, I was on the side that lost.*"

As a congregation and as individuals we spent a good amount of time on the issue. We held community seminars and presented our case for Biblical marriage. We discussed and responded to editorials in the newspaper. We addressed the topic in Bible Study and Teen Bible Study. We had a special Sunday at the beginning of this month as we took a stand for marriage. And then when the day came and the vote

came in we were left disappointed by the final results. It was frustrating, disheartening, and deflating.

But was all that effort worthless? Was it pointless to stand upon God Word of truth and confess what we believe? Of course not! We were blessed with an opportunity to look to God's Word, rediscover old truths, and find new nuggets of his grace. We were given the opportunity to grow in his word and publicly confess our faith to our friends and neighbors and to others around us.

It certainly would have been nice if we would have been able to help state government 'get it right' when it comes to a divinely instituted institution. It would have been nice to have a state constitution that better reflected the teachings of Holy Scripture. But as Jesus himself reminds us in our lesson for today, his kingdom is not of this world, it is from another place.

Christ Jesus' purpose here on this earth was never to an earthly influence in world governments. He did not come to overthrow the Romans. He did not come to be made into a king for the Jewish nation.

And no, Jesus did not come so that legislature would be passed in 21st century Minnesota. Rather, he came to do something much better. He came to save us. He came to proclaim and fulfill God's word of truth. He came to give that word to us. And through that word he would establish a different kind of kingdom, a kingdom not found in some heavily fortified location, or sprawled out on some impressive campus, but rather his kingdom is graciously established in the narrow places of our hearts and minds. And now as members of his kingdom we are to hold on to his word of truth as we seek to share its saving message with others. We do this so that many more might walk with Jesus in this life and stand at Jesus side in glory everlasting.

What side are you on? When this question is considered in the context of faith and judgment it is much more important than determining a side in political decisions. What side are you on? By God's grace we are on his side through faith in Jesus, and that's what really matters. **We are brought to his side through the power of the word. We stand by his side as we humbly listen to his word of truth. And he promises us that we will one day stand at his side in glory.** And you and I know that when Jesus makes a promise, it is the truth.

By nature we are much like Pontius Pilate – he was skeptical, spiritually discerned, too proud to believe what was right in front of him. With a touch of arrogance and a certain level of smugness Pilate asked Jesus, ***“Are you the King of the Jews?”*** Pilate knew that Jesus was not a threat to the Roman rule. He knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong. The chief priest and leaders of the Jews had already brought their false accusations against Jesus. They accused him of being a rebellious force, “subverting the nation” claiming “to be Christ, a King” (Luke 23:2). But this was done out of mere jealousy. There was no basis for a charge against him and Pilate knew it.

And so this proud ruler called for this poor mistreated man and asks him, ***“Are you the king of the Jews?”***

Even with his life on the line. Jesus is thinking of his great purpose to reach out to others. ***“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did other talk to you about me?”*** Jesus was not being defiant or coy with Pilate, but he was inviting Pilate to think over what he had seen and heard. He was inviting Pilate to be on the side of truth. Pilate must have known something about Jesus and the remarkable things he had done and the powerful message that he was proclaiming. After all, you would think that would be part of his responsibility as a Roman governor to know what was going on in his province. And yet Pilate was unwilling to concede that this was nothing more than a lowly Jewish peasant who was now standing before a powerful Roman governor. ³⁵ ***“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me.***

Jesus offered Pilate an opportunity to believe and to confess that Jesus was more than just some man. He may not have been some earthly ruler, but he was the chosen Savior of the world. He was God’s Son the King of kings sent from the Father above. But Pilate refused to believe and remained skeptical and critical of this man who had been rejected by his own people and appeared to be so powerless. Scoffing at Jesus Pilate continued to look for some reason to convict him offering his next question, ***“What is it you have done?”*** Pilate asked Jesus about his activities. Jesus’ answer instead reveals the true nature of his kingdom. ***“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”***

Jesus literally says to Pilate that my kingdom is not from here. His is not an earthly kingdom with servants who would fight to protect him, but his is a spiritual kingdom made up of those whom he has called to faith. His kingdom is from heaven. God established this kingdom from above. God sent his only Son to this world to proclaim and fulfill the word of truth so that he might rule in the hearts of believers and save us.

It is a miracle each time it happens. God takes skeptical, critical, sinful human beings, who are by nature enemies of God and he turns us around. He brings us to his side through the truth. By means of his powerful word and sacraments he changes our thinking, he changes our hearts, and we no longer question, we no longer criticize, insult, and reject, but instead we believe. By God’s grace somewhere down the line Jesus reached out to you through his word of truth, he established his kingdom in your hearts, so that you know and believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior. This man who appeared before Pilate as such a poor and lowly man was actually the all powerful Son of God who willingly stripped himself of his power so that he would die for suffer and die for the guilt of your sins and my sins. He did this so that

we could be reconciled to God. We are now on God's side through faith in Jesus. This message of truth gives us life and peace, and life eternal.

We are made to be members of his kingdom and now we stand with him. One might think that this should be an impressive line on our personal resume. But in the eyes of this world this is not only unimpressive but this means ridicule. It means being on the losing side of votes and the wrong side of public opinion. In this world today to be a member of Christ's kingdom often means suffering with Jesus. As the world continues going its own way, as it continues to depart from the truth of God's word, it continues to separate itself farther from Christianity. It used to be that the world just claimed that the church was disconnected and irrelevant, now our modern culture often calls making a stand for God's Word of truth offensive. This sinful world calls it bigotry, going as far as even calling it criminal.

As a result standing on God's Word of truth becomes difficult; not only publicly, but also personally. As we live in a world that constantly distorts and disregards God's Word we can't help but toe that line as well. Even though we are supposed to be on the side of God's Word of truth we distort, we manipulate the truth to justify our own sinful behavior. We disregard portions we don't really care to hear. We start to wander and go our own way. And suddenly the words of Jesus that could offer comfort sting with the law. ***Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.***"

The law does its work and these words lead us to ask the question, "What side *am* I on?" The sting of the law leads us to sorrow over sin and repentance. It is only through Christ that I can be saved. It is only through his word of truth that I can be spared the punishment I deserve. And in this word of truth I know that Jesus came to live and die for me. He came to establish his kingdom in my heart. He came to give me his word of truth. He came to guide me through life, and show me how to live for his glory. Most of all he came to give me heaven. My king, Christ Jesus, assures me that I will stand at his side in glory.

That is the assurance that we each have as members of Christ's kingdom. By God's gift of faith we know what side we are on. We are on his side. And that is never the wrong side. Despite what the world tells us it is never the wrong side. By grace He will stand with us in life. Standing on the side of truth we will listen to him. He will guide us with his Word. He will sustain us through disappointments of this life. And he will keep us faithful to him. He will help us as hold onto and clearly proclaim and defend and confess his word of truth. And the times we are put down, picked on, trampled on and left behind because of our faith he will pick us up and encourage us with the promise that one day we will rescue us from this world of sin and we will share in his glory. Our King, who came once in humility to save us, promises that he will come again in all his glory and we will stand at his side for all eternity. This is what your King, Christ Jesus promises. And what he promises is always the truth. Amen.