

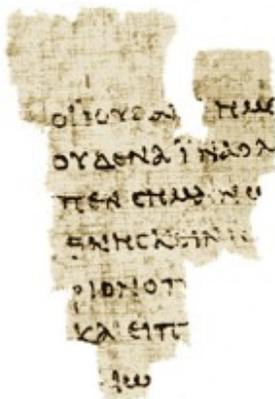
## Reign of Christ Sunday

John 18:33-37

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Christ Church

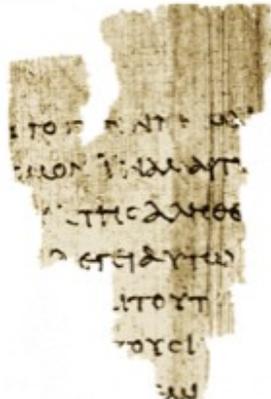
Sunday, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021

### Ryland's Papyrus of the Gospel of John (100 AD – 125 AD)



Front

*the Jews, "For us it is not permitted to kill anyone," so that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke signifying what kind of death he was going to die. Entered therefore again into the Praetorium Pilate and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Thou art king of the Jews?"*



Back

*a King I am. For this I have been born and (for this) I have come into the world so that I would testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears of me my voice." Said to him Pilate, "What is truth?" and this having said, again he went out unto the Jews and said to them, "I find not one fault in him."*

The Ryland's Library Papyrus P52 is an original Egyptian manuscript of the Gospel of John translated in Greek. The front contains parts of seven lines from John 18: 31-33. The back contains seven lines from John 18: 37-38. The papyrus has been dated to between 100 AD and 125 AD.

Jesus' death is dated to between 30 AD and 33 AD, which means that this translation of the Gospel of John was already being circulated in Egypt as early as 70 years after Jesus' crucifixion.

*Ryland's Library Papyrus P52, John Rylands University Library, Manchester, UK ~ The St. John's fragment is the oldest New Testament manuscript fragment in the world and dates between AD 117 & 138. The early date confirms that the original MSS of the Gospels were written within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses. It contains around 5 verses from John 18 and measuring only 3.5 by 2.5 inches at its widest.*

Source: Epic Archaeology, 2019

Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, the last Sunday of the Christian calendar.

From Advent to Christmas to Epiphany to Lent to Easter to Pentecost to Ordinary Time, we conclude a year-long pilgrimage of following events and stories in Jesus' ministry according to the Gospel of Mark.

Next week marks the first Sunday of Advent as we prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus, when we liturgically wait for the promised Messiah, and a new year of lectionary readings from the Gospel of Luke begins.

But today, we celebrate Jesus as the king in our lives.

While preparing this homily and reading many sermons and reflections, I discovered that today is a relatively new festival in our church, less than a hundred years old.

According to Rev. Craig Condon, *"it was only established by Pope Pius XI in 1925...[Benito Mussolini's Italy]...at a time when Europe was in chaos. Inflation was rampant, and colonialism was at its worst. The seeds of evil that would eventually grow into the Holocaust and World War II were being planted."* (Long Live the King! July 6, 2015, sermoncentral.com)

The people in Europe and the whole world were in despair. In order to give hope and peace, Pope Pius XI declared Christ as the King of Peace to the whole universe and so proclaimed *"the peace of Christ in the reign of Christ."* It was originally celebrated on the last Sunday in October or the Sunday before All Saints Day. In 1970, Pope Paul VI moved the feast day to the last Sunday of Ordinary Time when millions of Christians around the world celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Its focus on the importance we place on the Kingship of Christ is a reminder for all of us to check our priorities before we enter the Advent season. We sing hymns proclaiming Jesus's rule and reign, and also those which point towards our future hope as Christians. (*The Feast of Christ the King by Andy Walton, November 18, 2016, christiantoday.com*)

Let's look at the context of today's gospel reading: Jesus is on trial; the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, is moving back and forth between Jesus' accusers, the religious leaders, and Jesus himself: is He guilty or not guilty?

In our reading today, we have the middle section of Chapter 18. Previous verses are devoted to the betrayal by Judas, Jesus' arrest and appearance before Annas and the high priest, Caiaphas, Peter's denial of Jesus three times; then the Judeans find Jesus guilty of blasphemy and take him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, who questions his accusers outside his headquarters because the Jews refuse to enter, thinking that such

contact with Gentiles will defile them, and that would disqualify them from eating the Passover meal. Jewish law forbids execution and the priests and leaders want the Roman governor to find Jesus guilty and sentenced to death, and so they trump up different charges, political ones.

This is where our gospel reading begins, when Pilate returns to his palace and summons Jesus.

Rev. Jen Nagel of University Lutheran Church of Hope writes that *“It’s a strange mix of church and state and power.”*

*(The following adapted from Rev. Nagel’s sermon as noted in source below reflection):*

Pilate, the Roman Governor, and the [Judean elites] hate each other. Yet they dance this strange dance of hated political bedfellows. Pilate doesn't want to give them anything they want, but must keep the peace. The [Judeans] don't want Jesus to slip out of their hands so they must act like they respect Pilate.

So back and forth they go: *“Are you a king?”* Pilate asks over and over. And Jesus answers, *“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”* (John 18:37)

Pilate is trying to figure out why the Judean elites want Jesus dead; Jesus very clearly tells Pilate that he is no threat politically to Rome; his Kingdom as we know it is a spiritual kingdom and encompasses the hearts of believers.

Jesus’ earthly reign consisted of service to mankind and obedience to his heavenly father. Jesus was the revealed truth of God who came in human form.

*To further quote Rev. Nagel:*

The irony of this unique reign, this radical kingship, is evident all through the years.

From the prophets who foretold his coming,

To Mary who sang of God bringing down the powerful from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

From the magi who searched for baby Jesus while Herod fretted,

To his uncomfortable disciples as Jesus stooped to wash their feet in love not long before he died.

From that crown of thorns, to the purple robe, oh the list goes on.

Back and forth they go, some believing, others mocking, the leaders threatening, Pilate terrified,

A king or not a king, and if a king, clearly not the kind of king the world has ever seen before.

Jesus redefines, re-interprets what it means to be a king.

And he does it with the truth, not some heady truth that Pilate expects, but the truth revealed: dusty, embodied, saving, healing, loving, forgiving, redeeming, the truth that Jesus lives and bids us follow. (*ulch.org, November 25, 2018*)

He invites us to serve Him as our king. This means loving Him with all of who we are and obeying His commandments. Doing so will lead to a joy-filled life and ultimately to salvation and eternity with Him in the kingdom of heaven. (*"Taking It Home": Readings and Reflections for Christ the King Sunday, undated, stjoesmarion.org*)

Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (*John 14:6*)

Those who walk with God reach their destination, their final home. Max Lucado authored a book titled, *"The Applause of Heaven."* May I share an excerpt to conclude my reflection on this Reign of Christ Sunday?

The author has been flying home and imagines the crowd he will see in the Arrivals lounge of the airport, and these are the concluding paragraphs of his book.

*You'll be home soon, too. You may not have noticed it, but you are closer to home than ever before. Each moment is a step taken. Each breath is a page turned. Each day is a mile marked, a mountain climbed. You are closer to home than you've ever been.*

*Before you know it, your appointed arrival time will come; you'll descend the ramp and enter the City. You'll see faces that are waiting for you. You'll hear your name spoken by those who love you. And, maybe, just maybe – in the back, behind the crowds – the One who would rather die than live without you will remove his pierced hands from his heavenly robe and...applaud. (pp 193-194, 2011)*

*Amen*

Selected Readings and Resources include:

*Jesus, the King of Truth* (John 18:33-38a) by Steven J. Cole, June 2014, bible.org

*Listen...Can You Hear Him?* By Rev. Sharron R. Blezzard, November 21, 2012, Stewardship of Life Institute

*Reign of Christ Sunday* by Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope, November 22, 2015, [ulch.org](http://ulch.org)

*Christ the King B: What Does This Mean?* by David Lose, November 23, 2018, [davidlose.net](http://davidlose.net)

*Long Live the King!* by Craig Condon, July 6, 2015, [sermoncentral.com](http://sermoncentral.com)

*Christ the King Sunday* by Robin Stephenson-Bratcher & Dennis Bratcher, *The Voice*, Christian Resource Institute, 2018, [crivoice.org](http://crivoice.org)

*The Feast of Christ the King* by Andy Walton, November 18, 2016, [christiantoday.com](http://christiantoday.com)

various sermons, [sermoncentral.com](http://sermoncentral.com)

various sermons, [textweek.com](http://textweek.com)