

You Must Not be from Around Here?

(John 18:33-37)

The mayor of the Village of Milagro stared at the young graduate student from New York City as if to say, "You must not be from around here." He was simply stating the obvious as he greeted Herby Platt from State University of New York. Herby had just arrived in northern New Mexico right off the "chili truck" so to speak!

He explained to the mayor that he had come to live among the natives of Northern New Mexico for several months to teach and study "indigenous peoples" of the southwest; to gather vital information for his Master's thesis.

It was obvious that Herby was not of this world in Milagro. He was tall and lanky with sandy red hair, looking more Irish than Hispanic. This immediately separated him from the locals and revealed the truth in the mayor's unwelcoming stare which said, "You must not be from around here." To say the least, Herby stood out like a sore thumb.

This is a scene from the movie, *The Milagro Beanfield War*. As the story continues Herby discovers many other distinctions that separate him from the culture of Northern New Mexico. He is for sure a stranger in a strange land – not of this world he finds in Milagro.

It must have been very demoralizing to Herby. Think for a moment how you might feel to find yourself in a strange world only to have the first person you meet say, "You must not be from around here." Please pray with me.

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O God of our Salvation. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and to the word proclaimed. Remind us eternally of what Jesus means when he says, "My kingdom is not of this world." Amen.

Have you ever found yourself in Herby's shoes? I have! During the many years I traveled around the world, I frequently found myself to be a stranger in a strange land, to be judged by my appearance, my education, my accent or lack of an accent, or what I believed in; to be "not of this world."

Those of us who have walked a mile or two in Herby's shoes might have a better understanding of what is happening to Jesus when Pilate makes a similar pronouncement as if to say to Jesus, "You must not be from around here."

Today is New Year's Eve. The church calendar begins a new liturgical year with the first Sunday in Advent – that's next Sunday when we gather for the Advent Festival. But the year ends today on Christ the King Sunday – that time in our Christian life when we celebrate the coming reign of Jesus Christ and the anticipation of the completion of God's creating acts.

Pilate's interrogation is an important theological turning point in understanding the coming of the kingdom and the lordship of Christ

because it responds to that statement, “You must not be from around here.” Perhaps this is the reason the account is found in all four gospels.

The interrogation begins with that infamous leading question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Could it be that Pilate is just a little bit confused in asking this question? After all, he works for the same Roman government that had already installed Herod as “King of the Jews.” Perhaps Pilate thinks Jesus hasn’t yet heard of Herod’s reign and title in Judea.

In a manner of speaking, Pilate is saying to Jesus, “You must not be from around here. Haven’t you heard, the Jews already have a king and his name isn’t Jesus of Nazareth?” In a similar manner of speaking, Jesus agrees with Pilate when he responds, “Well actually I am not from around here.”

“My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus answers quickly. “Otherwise my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to you.” It was true, Jesus was a king, but his kingdom was unlike anything that Pilate, Herod, or the chief priests could have ever imagined.

The kingdom that Christ rules is not one built on political power, conflict and jealousy. It’s a kingdom characterized by righteousness, peace, and hope. Even though Pilate is ignorant of this coming “kingdom,” it’s a kingdom that’s was among us, even within us. Christ rules a kingdom that is not of this world.

Pilate, as accuser and judge over Jesus is faced with the exact same question we must all address in each our lives. Who is this Jesus? It’s not a question for the larger faith community. It’s a uniquely personal question – one

that can only be addressed on a very personal level.

You may recall that I have asked you all several times to consider what your experience of Jesus Christ is and why the rest of the world just can’t live without knowing about your experience. The answer to that question is the foundation for answering Pilate’s question, “Who is Jesus?”

At some point in each of our lives we must decide who Jesus is for our own self. As believers, most of us have said we accept Jesus Christ as our lord and savior. We professed our belief, or it was professed on our behalf at our baptism, and confirmed by us at our confirmation or when we joined the church. The follow up to our professing our belief is our acceptance of Christ’s sole authority over our lives. This is what makes us truly Christian!

To accept the lordship of Christ requires that we turn over control of our lives to him completely; to turn over to him control of our individual kingdoms that we have built – our metaphorical cities we talked about last week. Not an easy thing to do. But when we give up our own kingdoms and metaphorical cities by submitting to the authority of Christ we begin to live in God’s kingdom.

By personal kingdoms or those metaphorical cities, I am speaking of those temporal or earthly things that influence us in our daily lives. These are the things that define our individual kingdoms. It’s at those times when we become frustrated with our kingdom – those times when things just don’t seem to be running right – that we need to give up ruling our kingdoms and give control to Jesus. When we operate under the authority of Jesus Christ – when we allow God to guide our lives –

we discover that we are truly blessed – we are loved by God.

Naming Jesus as Lord has much to do with thinking about our personal image of God and Jesus Christ in our lives. There are many different uses of the word “lord.” One usage, it seems, causes a particular concern.

It’s difficult for some folks to imagine Jesus as lord today in our contemporary setting when we have a quite different understanding of another kind of lord – the “landlord.” If you’ve ever rented an apartment or leased land you may be one of these people.

What is a “landlord?” He or she is the one who owns and/or manages the *apartment* or the *land*. The “landlord” is the lord of the land, the one who has dominion over the land, the one who says what can be done with or on the land.

If in answering the question “Who is Jesus” we understand that we are to give all authority to Jesus for the living of our lives, we could then imagine Christ to be our “life-lord.” Christ should be the one who has dominion over our lives, the one who says what can or can’t be done in or with our lives – our life-lord.

As Pilate sits as accuser and judge over Jesus the truth and promise of the Gospel message is revealed as he is faced with the exact same question we all face. Who is Jesus? As I said earlier, this is not a question for the gathered community. It’s a personal question that can only be answered on an intimate level by each one of us.

When we accept Christ as our lord and savior, we discover that we are able to turn over to him control of the kingdoms we have built for ourselves here on earth. Instead of ruling our kingdoms we discover that living a

Christ-centered life becomes a more important use of our time and better serves the kingdom of God for all time.

The kingdom of God is coming. It hasn’t arrived in it’s fullness, but the kingdom is among us. In many ways, we have one foot in our earthly kingdoms and one foot in God’s kingdom. But we are meant to have both feet in God’s kingdom. The kingdom is Christ’s fulfillment of everything God has promised. Christ is the king, the lord of our lives, because, we really aren’t from around here either.