

Reflection on Sunday 23 November 2025

by Adrian Walter, Lay Leader of Worship

Christ the King

As Alan reminds us at our all-age services, the church tells the time by using colours, and today we are in the red.

Growing up in a non-conformist tradition, I had no knowledge of the ecclesiastical calendar. Oh, I knew all about Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, because we got days off school for those, but the rest of the church year totally passed me by. It wasn't until we bought the house in France that I was introduced to other feast days. We once arrived at our French house on Wednesday 15th August and the assumption of Adrian was that the Intermarché would be open. Unfortunately, it was the Assumption of Mary, so all the shops were closed and we had to scabble around to find something to feed the children!

Tomorrow is Stella's birthday and we are almost always away for that. One year, her birthday fell on a Sunday and, as we were in Norwich, we went to Norwich Cathedral, a church I love and have been to many times. That was the day I was introduced to the feast of Christ the King. The celebrant and preacher was the retired Bishop of Swaziland (or somewhere similar) and he prefaced his sermon with the words, "One of the best things about being a retired Bishop is that I'm totally fireproof – I can say what I like and they can't sack me!" That woke the congregation up! He then proceeded to deliver a powerful and captivating message on the meaning of Christ the King. Sadly, what I am about to say will be a pale shadow of his sermon, but I hope I can remain true to his overall message.

It falls in two parts –

What kind of King is He? and,
What kind of Subjects are we?

What kind of King?

When we hear the word “king,” images of palaces, crowns, thrones and majestic processions may come to mind. But Christ’s kingship is not of this world. He was born in a stable and grew up in a normal family, not a palace and a royal household. He wore a crown of thorns, not a crown of jewels. His royal procession was on a donkey, not a warhorse, and later it was on foot through the streets of Jerusalem; far from majestic as it ended at Calvary where His throne was to be a cross, not a throne of gold, and where, instead of being worshipped, He was mocked.

Jesus declared before Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world,” but Pilate did not get it. He didn’t understand that Jesus’ authority did not rely on armies, weapons or wealth, but on the power of truth, justice and love, a love that embraces all - even His enemies. And, despite being well versed in the scriptures, the religious leaders didn’t get it either. The ancient prophecies foretold a Messiah who would suffer and die but rise and rule in justice and peace.

In Psalm 72, we read, “He shall judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice,” and Jesus fulfils these words, not by conquering lands, but by conquering hearts. His reign is one where the last are first, the meek inherit the earth, and peace is forged through forgiveness. His rule brings hope to the oppressed, comfort to the sorrowful and dignity to the downtrodden.

However, we will be hearing much more about Christ's first coming from next Sunday onwards as we begin Advent, even if commercially we've been winding up for Christmas since August bank holiday! So, let's move on to the second question...

What kind of Subjects are we?

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul tells these followers of Christ the King that they were called to be imitators of Christ, and today we are called to do likewise, to recognise His reign in our lives. This is not simply a matter of private devotion; it has real, practical consequences.

Today, we hear a lot about citizenship and how people who want to live in the UK from other countries should be made to take a Citizenship Test, an exam where they show they understand the British way of life, its values and their responsibilities as citizens.

And it's no different in Christ's kingdom. If we're serious about being subjects of Christ's Kingdom, we need to accept our responsibilities as citizens of that kingdom. We need to pass the Heavenly Kingdom citizenship test. What's that? In Micah 6, we hear God, speaking through the prophet, say, "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." In other words, we are to strive for justice, to seek peace, to forgive those who wrong us and to serve without counting the cost. It means putting the values of the Gospel above all pursuits of power, wealth and status.

The feast of Christ the King was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to remind Christians that their allegiance was to their spiritual king in heaven as opposed to any earthly ruler, allegiance that was being claimed by Benito Mussolini. The Anglican Church, Lutherans, Presbyterians and Methodists soon

joined in, adding this Feast Day to their lectionary (which makes perfect sense when you realise it was a response to the growing fascist movement sweeping Europe).

Which brings us bang up to date. You don't have to be an avid follower of current affairs to know that far right politics has been gradually, but steadily, gaining support in the UK, Europe and elsewhere in the world. The principles of justice, love and mercy are as far from many people's minds as they were in the years between the two world wars, only this time there doesn't appear to be a nation that will stand against the tide.

Just take a moment to consider the small boats – whatever the solution to the current migrant situation, it is certainly not to demonise those seeking refuge, to use social media to spread misinformation and hatred, to base voting decisions on a single issue, to seek to protect our own high levels of peace, wealth and comfort, while ignoring the dire situations others find themselves in.

Is this all getting a bit political? Well, that's the whole point of this Sunday. This feast day was instituted by the church as a response to a political problem; and it's exactly the same problem we're facing today. As one of my heroes, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, once said, "I am puzzled about which Bible people are reading when they suggest that religion and politics don't mix." Why is that? Well, it's because, as Christians, we have Dual Citizenship and therefore responsibilities to not one but two Kingdoms.

The Bible is very clear about what happens when leaders make laws that are oppressive and unjust, particularly those that increase the suffering of the poor. It spells out the consequences - people descend into confusion and despair and turn to division

and infighting. As we draw near to the season of Advent, the season when we remember God coming in human form to show us His kingdom values, the cries of the suffering and the oppressed are with us still.

And the irony is that many of those seeking refuge in our kingdom will become, or already are, our fellow citizens of God's Kingdom, and that makes them our brothers and sisters in Christ.

To ignore our King's principles of justice, peace, forgiveness, service, to ignore the values of the Gospel, the values Jesus Christ gave his life for, is to effectively crucify Him all over again.

To stand idly by while others pour scorn on and discriminate against those who are different, those who are poor, marginalised, abused - the refugee and the homeless - we make ourselves no better than those who poured scorn on Christ on the cross.

Instead, as we heard Paul urging Timothy, we are to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."

So, we come to The Paradox of the Cross. On this day, we remember that Christ's victory, His kingship, is crowned at the Cross. Here, His true kingship is revealed - not in selfish ambition, but in selfless giving. In dying, He destroyed death; in rising, He opened to all the way to life.

This paradox should, indeed must, challenge us: We all try hard to meet the responsibilities of our earthly citizenship but what

about the responsibilities of our Heavenly citizenship? Are we, like the Thessalonians, imitators of our Heavenly King?

May it be always said of us and our church that we “act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.”

Amen

