

Sermon on Sunday 21 November 2021

Christ the King

by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Readings: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 & John 18:33-37

Why do we need a King?



Imagine a country that thought that it was different and had high aspirations for its role amongst nations. In reality, the kings of the past had failed and its current leaders were ineffectual, largely removed from ordinary people and in cahoots with powers who were oppressive and corrupt. That was Palestine, 2,000 years ago. The Jewish People, a proud nation, convinced of their relationship with God, and who hung onto the traditional belief in the Golden Era of King David, were oppressed and occupied by the Romans and, furthermore, their own leaders appeared to gain from working with the enemy. There was the belief that God would send them a descendant of David, the Messiah who would save them and make it all work again. How they wanted that King David figure. How they wanted certainty, security, and greatness again.

After the feeding of The Five Thousand, John's Gospel tells us that, 'When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him **king**, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself' (6:15). In today's reading we have an extract from Jesus' trial before Pilate, the Roman Procurator. He asks Jesus whether he is **king** of the Jews but, Jesus does not use the title for himself and instead answers, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' When asked: What have you done? Jesus explains: 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews" (John 18:36).

Jesus is in front of a man who understands authority as coming from the Roman Emperor who maintains this by and through oppression, intimidation and the use of force. Pilate is miles away from understanding a kingdom of service, of forgiveness, of love and of a peace that transcends all understanding, let alone a king who will sacrifice his own life out of love for all peoples. Yet Pilate was left wondering 'What is the truth of all of this?'

Flash forward to 1925. Many were still trying to recover from the dreadful loss of life, psychological stress and societal upheaval resulting from the First World War. Now they were in the middle of an economic Depression. The revolution had happened in Russia, fascism was on the rise with Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany; the world was changing. Pope Pius XI decided to create a day which spoke to the feelings of ordinary men and women who were questioning the abilities of their leaders to construct a lasting peace and security and who feared the future.

The old political order was breaking down. What was the truth? Which leaders could be trusted? Pius XI pointed to the image of 'Christ the King' to say that there is one King in whom we can invest our whole selves, one king in which there exists the truth of the universe, one king for whom failure is not possible because his reign is eternal – it transcends time and space - 'His kingdom is not from here'. Jesus as the Son of God crucified and as the Risen Christ also ascends to God the father - his reign cannot end.

In the 1970s, more and more churches started to join Roman Catholics by taking up Pope Pius' wish of a day to mark the Feast of Christ the King - **today, the Sunday before Advent Sunday, is that day.** Christ sits in glory and is both alpha and omega - the beginning and the end. Christ is present at Creation and presiding in the Judgment of the World. Christ calls us to turn to him; he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. And so, one of our readings today is from Daniel – a vision of divine Glory and Judgment over all peoples. It is both a salutary reminder after our November Remembrance of those who have died in war and an invitation to the season of Advent.

Yet the feast day of 'Christ the King' is not just a neat way to end the church calendar. In our world today, relationships within and between countries are ever-changing and often heart-rending. There are around 40 areas across the world experiencing profound challenge to their society from conflict or war. When it comes to major problems such as Climate Change, Human Rights, Weapons Proliferation and Armed Conflict our leaders in 2021 fail to agree, find it difficult to work together and continue to act largely out of immediate concerns of wealth and power.

Like Pilate we ask ourselves: What is the truth in all of this? Ultimately, in what or whom or where do I place my trust? In what or whom or where can I find peace that is lasting; discover a meaning that does not lose its authority and a security that cannot fail me?

We are asked today and each day to follow Jesus as Lord of all. This means we enter a relationship with him and acknowledge Jesus as King of Kings; to turn to him as being the Way, the Truth and the Life offering our bodies, minds and hearts. We follow his example of service, to seek justice for all and share his love. Christ the King says to us, the kingdom of God is here, turn to me and be welcomed, work with me and let me work through you, be part of my kingdom.