

## Christ the King

Daniel 7:9-10, 13, 14

Revelation 1:4b-8

John 18:33-37

Sometimes I look around at world leaders and what I see are people who have a love of power. It seems to me that there used to be politicians whose motivating desire was to work for the common good, who had a desire to serve the country and do what they could for the benefit of all. But now, it appears, so many leaders and erstwhile leaders are just after power. The love of power dominates all they are and all they do.

Today is the feast day of Christ the King (the patronal festival here). Perhaps the two thoughts of Jesus Christ and King don't sit well together in our minds. Maybe when we think of kingship we think of that power that so many leaders lust after and crave. And when we think of Jesus we think of Jesus the healer, the compassionate Jesus, the gentle and caring Jesus, the self sacrificing Jesus, Jesus full of wisdom, perhaps even an angry Jesus but a Jesus with a lust for power – certainly not. So what does it mean to think of Christ as King?

Since August we have been taking a speedy trip through the Bible, beginning at the beginning – with the creation stories in Genesis, and now about to reach the climax next week as we will ponder on Advent Sunday the coming of Christ in glory.

And as part of that journey we spent some time with the kings of Israel. We recalled that the people of Israel asked God for a king so that they could be like the other nations. The prophet Samuel warned against this with words that came from God himself. Words that could be paraphrased as 'it will all end in tears'. Human kings will end up serving themselves and seeking power for its own sake. And as we travelled through the years we saw that Samuel was indeed right. The kings began to love power more than God and the people. They tried to play political games with the leaders of other nations in the area and it didn't take long before the nation of Israel split, alliances failed and invasion and exile followed. All seemed lost.

But before things went completely pear shaped there were some good times. Times when God was honoured and the people prospered. One of the first kings, King David, loved God and sought to serve him. He didn't get everything right, he often made mistakes, but he was sensible and godly enough to admit when he had got things wrong, and turn back to God.

And great promises were made to him through the prophets that his line – his dynasty – would last forever, like these words from the prophet Nathan.

*When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.*

As Christians we believe that Jesus – the Messiah – is the fulfilment of the promises made to David. That Jesus is the one who will reign forever. Which is why we celebrate the feast of Christ the King today.

The gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke begin with lists of the ancestors of Jesus – lists which show quite clearly that Jesus was born of David's line – one of David's descendants. The Christmas stories remind us that the Kingship of Jesus is part of who he is. Gabriel announced to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus - *he will have the throne of his ancestor David, he will reign over the house of Israel, and his kingdom will have no end.* And the wise men as they searched for him said to Herod – *where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?*

And yet we don't often in our prayers and in our devotions think of Jesus as King. The NT scholar Tom Wright feels that we are missing out on a key aspect of the Christian faith here. In his translations of scripture he emphasises the Kingship of Jesus and often refers to him as King Jesus.

So what difference would it make to our faith, our Christian lives, if we thought more of this aspect of Jesus? A king has authority and power, but a good king is also compassionate and caring. Maybe we concentrate too much on the caring Jesus, and not on his authority and power. Perhaps we find it hard to reconcile

authority and power with Jesus, so much has our understanding of power been influenced by what we see all around us in the example of human leadership.

Jesus redefines leadership. He sets an example as one who serves, as one whose power and authority are demonstrated in humility and weakness. So perhaps before we can fully appreciate what the kingship of Jesus means we have to discard our human notions of power. True power and authority is found in God, and therefore in Jesus – fully god and fully human. And true power and authority is shown not through coercion but through love. In Jesus we can how that power is shown in love. Jesus shows us the power of love, while what we see around us is the love of power.

In the gospel reading today the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate – a man who was caught in the power trap – asks Jesus – are you the King of the Jews? Jesus, as he does so many times, answers indirectly. My kingdom is not of this world.

Here he underlines this difference between the love of power and the power of love. To accept Jesus as King, to be part of his Kingdom – the Kingdom of God – we have to live lives that are at odds with all around us. Lives that come from following the example of Jesus and following his teaching. Where love is the overriding principle; where service is the norm and where status is not sought after. Lives of contentment and obedience. Lives based on a trust in God and his promises.

This is the way that we are called to live, As citizens of the kingdom of God; as those who recognise that Christ really is our King.

We know, of course, that most people will not live in this way, but that shouldn't stop us from doing what we can. Jesus talks of the Kingdom – the recognition of his kingship – as being something that grows. It might be tiny now – Jesus himself uses the example of a mustard seed, a tiny seed, but it will grow and ultimately come to fruition at the end times, when Christ shall come again. But more of that next week on Advent Sunday.