

Sunday 25th November – Christ the King

Isaiah 2:2-4

Romans 14:13-19

Mark 4:26-34

Today is the festival of Christ the King.

I wonder what comes to mind when you think of a King? I (like many of us I suspect) have never known the reign of a king at first hand. Perhaps some of you remember George 6 but I would think it was in your childhood days.

So King.

Maybe what comes to mind are the Kings in the Bible. In the books of Kings (obviously) and Chronicles we find lists of good kings and bad kings. King David, Solomon and the rest

Maybe it's a list of kings and dates from history books. 1066 and all that, the Tudors, Stuarts etc etc

Maybe it's the Shakespeare plays. I remember well seeing the whole cycle of the history plays from Richard 2 through the Henry's to Richard 3 when the RSC did them some years back – including seeing 3 in one day!

Or perhaps its other rulers. Presidents, prime ministers, emperors. Again some good, some bad. Most a mixture of good, bad and indifferent.

But Christ the King. To whom this church is dedicated. And what we are celebrating today.

What do we understand by that.

There are precious few direct references in scripture to Christ as the King. However, the word Christ means anointed one. It's the same word as Messiah.

In the OT the anointed ones were mainly the kings. (although there are occasional references to prophets & priests being anointed).

At Christmas time we are reminded of the wise men searching for the King of the Jews; at Easter of the question asked by Pilate of Jesus – are you the King of the Jews?; and then there is a reference in Paul's first letter to Timothy of Jesus being "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". Jesus himself tells the parable of the sheep and the goats about the Son of Man (himself) who he also refers to as the King.

However, much more prevalent in the gospels on the lips of Jesus is the phrase "Kingdom of God" or its equivalent in Matthew's gospel "kingdom of Heaven". So I would like to think a bit about kingdoms, especially the kingdom of God

It's the marks of the Kingdom of a King that show whether (in black and white terms) a king is good or bad.

Hence in our own day we might look at GDP, or growth rate, or unemployment statistics or poverty indicators or any number of measures and decide whether a prime minister (or government) is good or bad. And our answer will probably depend on our political persuasions.

In the OT times, the measures were less economic but more social, moral and religious. Good kings (and there were precious few) were the ones that kept the laws of Moses and the worship of the one true God. The ones under whose authority there was practical concern for the poor and marginalised. The bad kings were the ones who accepted the beliefs and practices of other nations, worshipping the Baals, or worshipping ancestors and the like. They were the ones who turned away from the law of Moses; the ones who were concerned about themselves and their own wealth rather than the people's well being. It was to these that the prophets brought their messages from God.

The extent of the ways in which the nation turned away from God under the bad kings is shown, for example, in the story of the rediscovery of the book of the law during the reign of Josiah. When the law was read afresh to the people who then began to realise how far they had fallen away; they repented and worshipped him again. But as always seemed to be the case it was a short lived revival.

So if Jesus Christ (the anointed) is King; what is his Kingdom like? What are its characteristics, and what does it mean for us today to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Lets look at some words from our 2nd reading from Paul's letter to the Romans. He describes the Kingdom of God as righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Righteousness – here he is talking about our relationship with God; how we need to be in a right relationship with him; by being forgiven of those things which mar the relationship, and by recognising the importance of worship and prayer;

Peace. And as we thought a few weeks ago this is more than simply the absence of conflict. Its also the presence of something godlike, the presence of love, the encouragement of relationships that build healing and unity, the presence of a spirituality that leads to harmony.

The presence of the kinds of things that Jesus' life and death give us examples of; the presence of well-being and of wholeness, of love and acceptance; of selflessness and mercy; of forgiveness and understanding

And finally joy in the Holy Spirit. God within and alongside us day by day. Living each moment of each day in his presence. His breath within us. Giving us life. And joy, not simply happiness, but a deep joy and comfort in all that we are and all that we do.

The Kingdom of God, then is a kingdom based not on wealth or success or fame or even happiness in its temporary and fleeting sense, but a kingdom based on the one true God as demonstrated supremely in the life, death and resurrection of the King, Jesus the anointed one.

And Jesus taught us – as illustrated in our gospel reading – that this kingdom grows. It has small beginnings, but God gives it growth. It doesn't depend on us, on our strength, our intelligence, our skill – but it depends on God. For only God can grow things that are of God.

Its in our gift to stop its growth, to prevent it, to step away from it. But we cannot bring the growth.

Jesus talks in this way about growth because growth means flourishing and life. Not stationary; not content with how it is now. But concern about the future. How things might develop and spread. And critically about he speaks of fruit.

So the kingdom is far from static. Its growing and expanding. Its bringing forth fruit – in terms of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of lives changed, people brought into the Kingdom.

And our part in all this?

To live as citizens of the Kingdom. To honour and worship God. To live lives of active peace; to put others first; to follow Jesus' example; to be concerned about the growth and spread of the Kingdom; to desire to be bearers of fruit.

So for us at the Churches of Christ the King and St Johns, and in this Parish.

To want the Kingdom to embrace more people; to desire growth. Of the church, but not just of the church.

To want people in this parish and beyond to enter the kingdom; to recognise the truth and call of Jesus on their lives; to live according to righteousness, peace and the joy of the Spirit, following the selfless example of Jesus. And to do all we can to enable and bring this about. Even if this means changing some of what we do and how we live – as it probably will have to.

But always remembering that its God who brings the growth.

SO today, as we think of Christ our King, let us recommit ourselves to the values of the Kingdom of God. Let us recognise his part in our growth into the kingdom, and do all we can to help him bring others into the kingdom. For although it is his work, he can only do it through people like you and me.