

## **Sermon for the Feast of Christ the King. 21 November 2021.**

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When you think of Jesus what image or phrase comes to mind? Do you think of him as Immanuel God with you, do you think of him as the Good Shepherd who guides you, protects you and leads you, maybe you think of him as the Lamb of God, or Prince of peace, friend of sinners, or Saviour of the world? Do you perhaps think of him as gentle Jesus meek and mild? Or as a great teacher or healer? I wonder does the image of Christ as King ever come to mind when you think of him?

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

When we look at the Gospels, we see that Jesus' life is framed by kingship. At his birth wise men, travelled from the East following a star to search for and bring gifts to the new-born King of the Jews. They found the infant Jesus not in a palace but in a stable amongst oxen and other animals. Do kings usually begin their lives born in a stable to refugee parents surrounded by oxen?

And at his crucifixion nailed above his head is a sign stating, 'This, is Jesus, King of the Jews.' Do kings usually end their lives ridiculed and hanging on a cross, not wearing a golden crown but rather a crown of thorns?

Our Gospel reading this morning focuses on a conversation between Pilate and Jesus. Pilate had no interest in religion or theology. His objective was maintaining Roman law and Roman control. Rome would tolerate no king but Caesar. King" was a political title, and Pilate focuses on a political question as he asks Jesus, 'Are you the King of the Jews? "

When we think of a king we usually think of a throne, a palace, a crown, power, wealth, prestige, and servants. But when we look at Jesus in this morning's gospel reading, we see none of these things.

As Jesus stands before Pilate, he doesn't look much like a king, he is a prisoner who is considered an enemy of the state, a blasphemer, a criminal who is about to be condemned to death.

Many in Jesus' day struggled with the concept of Jesus as a king and with understanding what the kingdom of God looked like and meant. Like Pilate many people were confused about Jesus. They had heard talk about him being the longed-for messiah, the conquering king who would free them from Rome's tyrannical rule, yet he didn't look much like a king, dress like a King, live like a king, act like a King, so maybe he wasn't a King after all. And if he wasn't a King what and who was he?

Maybe we ask the same question ourselves. Is Jesus a king and if not what or who is he? If we think that he was just a good teacher, we can pick and choose the nice things that he said and agree with them and ignore his hard and difficult sayings and teaching. And if he's not a King then we don't have to obey him when we don't want to.

But, John in his Gospel goes to great lengths to show that Jesus is indeed King, not a King in the sense that the world would recognise, rather he is a king who speaks to the lowly, and the outcast, he is a king who serves rather than being served. He is a king who enters the city of Jerusalem humbly on a donkey, not triumphantly on a horse. He was not to be found in a palace surrounded by servants and wealth, instead he was to be found walking the dusty roads of Palestine surrounded by the poor, the weak, the sick, the outcasts and those on the fringes of society. On the night before he died, we find him not in a palace surrounded by servants, no, we find him kneeling on the floor with a towel around his waist as he washes the dirty, dusty feet of his disciples, even the feet of Judas, the disciple who was to betray him.

And today, where are we to find King Jesus? He is found in Scripture, in the breaking of bread. He found as he draws near to us in our weakness, fear and doubt, We also find him where you would least expect to

find a king, amongst the broken the lonely, the hurting, the poor. He is a King who is willing to embrace all, forgive all, redeem all.

And the uncomfortable truth is that whether we like it or not, whether we believe it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, Jesus is indeed King. Whether we bow in reverence and worship, or whether we ignore the commands that we don't like and worship other people, or other things, he is King of Kings, full of authority and power, but not as the world understands power and authority, his is an authority of love, peace, justice, mercy and grace. He is indeed Lord of all, king of the universe, the one to whom we all owe allegiance, ruler, and judge of all. Christ's power was never self-serving, rather it was exercised on behalf of others. He is a King like no other, and his kingdom is like no other too.

Kings have kingdoms and Christ the king has a Kingdom but as he declares to Pilate his Kingdom is not of this world. So, what does the kingdom of God look like. An article that I read states that The Kingdom of God is a space. It exists in every home where love is shown. It exists in every region and country that cares for its weak and vulnerable. It exists in every parish that reaches out to the needy.

The Kingdom of God is a time. It happens whenever someone feeds a hungry person, or shelters a homeless person, or shows care to a neglected person. It happens whenever we overturn an unjust law, or correct an injustice, or avert a war. It happens whenever people join in the struggle to overcome poverty, to erase ignorance, to pass on the faith.

The Kingdom of God is in the past (in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth); it is in the present (in the work of the Church and in the efforts of many others to create a world of goodness and justice); it is in the future (reaching its completion in the age to come).

In Jesus Christ the reign of God has already come and is coming. It will come in its fulness on His glorious return. In the meantime, Christ invites us to live in, anticipate and spread that kingdom.

At the end of our gospel reading Pilate asks Jesus 'So are you a king? To which Jesus replies 'you say that I am a king?' As this liturgical year ends let us examine our hearts and ask do the words that we speak and the way that we live our lives declare that Christ is our King? Am I, are we prepared to pray that His kingdom will come and his will will be done in our lives?

I confess that there is often something that rises up in me that says I want to be in control, but I have found out the hard way that this only leads to more heartache, anxiety and stress. I am reminded on an almost daily basis that I need to slow down and invite Jesus to be Lord and king over my life, my thoughts, my relationships, my conversations, my dreams, my actions, my expectations, my finances, my decisions, my time.

Submitting to Christ as our Lord and king isn't a one-off decision, it is a decision that we need to make every day.

May we rejoice in calling Christ our King. May Christ our King rule in our hearts, our lives and our homes. May Christ's kingdom values of love peace and forgiveness be known among us. Come, Christ our King, and reign over us, as you reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God forever. AMEN.