CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	22 November 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Christ the King
Preacher:	The Revd Jacob Wigley, Cathedral Deacon

Back in the day, there was a popular Christian kids' song called "Jesus is my superhero". The lyrics went through and compared Jesus to all sorts of otherworldly superheroes, and, in each case, stated that Jesus was "better" than the alternative. He's better than Superman; better than Batman; he's better – so goes the song – than Barbie… The problem is – among other things - that I can't identify with Superman, or with Batman, or with Barbie… I certainly couldn't identify with the King of the cosmos. But on this feast day of Christ the King, and here in our passage from Matthew, we are talking about a king who, while we could never identify with *him* all the way *up there*, instead comes and identifies with *us* all the way *down here*, and especially with the most vulnerable and marginalised. A very different kind of king. Very simply, this morning, - the final Sunday of the Church year – we consider the nature and the character of this king.

Unlike many other Christian festivals which were celebrated in the early church, Christ the King was introduced as late as 1925 under Pope Pius XI. In the aftermath of the Great War, the secularisation of society, the increased suspicion about the role of the church in public life, and with tyrants and dictators on the horizon, Christ the King sought to remind the church that all worldly powers and secular governments are time-limited, provisional, and ultimately answerable to Christ.

The Nature of the King

On this feast day, then, some of the higher claims of the Christian gospel are brought to the forefront. It is sometimes said "never talk about politics or religion in polite company", as though our faith were just a private thing, an inward thing; something that gets us through the day, but let's not get carried away.

Today, however, we are reminded that the church makes claims about Jesus which are not just personally beneficial, or something that happens *in here*. It is a claim about something *out there*; that in Jesus something about the very reality of things has actually changed. That Christ really is, as our Ephesians reading said it: "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion."

Of course, if Jesus were just an inward voice, or a personal guru, much of the persecution of the early church might have been avoided. But many of the early Christians were willing to die, and indeed some of them did die, not because they believed Christianity was *inwardly helpful*, but because it was *true*.

For us to celebrate Christ the King is to celebrate that the statements made in our readings about Jesus are actually true. In the encyclical which introduced this feast day, Pope Puis expressed his hope that we would be encouraged to live with greater confidence "under the banner of Christ their king". That, knowing Christ to be the supreme authority, we would not retreat from public life, or reduce Jesus to something less than he claimed to be. And, instead, being willing to say, not just within these walls, but beyond them, and not just as a subjective idea, but as an objective reality; Christ *has* died, Christ *is* risen, Christ *will* come again.

The Character of the King

Our readings today are concerned, however, not just with the reality of Jesus as king, but with what this king is like. That's not so

surprising; to risk a clumsy parallel, when we join a new organisation, one of the first questions we ask is about the boss: "what are they like?" And perhaps the only thing more radical than saying Jesus is king, is saying what kind of king is Jesus.

Our gospel reading opens with kingship as we might expect it; The Son of Man comes in glory, accompanied by angels, and takes his place upon a glorious throne. All the nations are gathered before him, and he exercises the authority to judge them. This judgment is good news, because it means the injustices of the world will not go unanswered, and that the present state of things is not their final state. As Saint Paul says in his letter to the Romans: "the sufferings of this present day are not worth comparing to the glory which will be revealed to us".

But then, the passage changes, and it breaks the kingship mold. Because this king, seated up on his throne, *also* -not instead of, but *also*- identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, and visited the imprisoned, discover that, in so doing, they were serving Christ himself. And, conversely, that those who neglected such people are told that they had neglected Christ.

In the passage, both groups; those who had served the needy, and those who hadn't, seemed equally surprised. They both ask the same question: "Lord, when did we see you?" And the answer shows something of the kind of king we live under; he was seen -the *king* was seen- in the needy and vulnerable.

He emptied himself, it says in the New Testament, made himself like nothing. It is a kingship that looks like a crown -not of gold and jewels- but of thorns. As goes my favourite hymn; "Did ever such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?" Therefore, the same passage continues, "God exalted him and gave

him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth." We are citizens of that kind of king, and we are citizens of that kind of kingdom.

Conclusion

I have here with me my passport [*prop*]. It has my face, my picture, my name, and serves as evidence that I am a citizen of the United Kingdom. But, under the kingship of Christ, we have acquired, as it were, dual citizenship. As Saint Paul puts it in Philippians: "our citizenship is in heaven".

I belong both to the United Kingdom, and the kingdom of God. But all the rulers, and powers and authorities in the fallen-former -and beyond- will always have to answer to the latter. And our heavenly passport, to push the metaphor, unlike *this one*, will never expire.

That is good news, because the king at the very top of the eternal kingdom, above all worldly powers, the judge of the whole world who comes to put everything right, is also the kind of king that washes the feet of his people, feeds them, clothes them, and ultimately, at the cross, the kind of king that considers his citizens worth dying for.