

Sermon for Christ the King

25th November – 11am Eucharist

May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Today is the last Sunday of the Church's year,

A Sunday where we celebrate

The feast of Christ the King

we have prayed in the Collect

'Eternal Father,

whose Son Jesus Christ

ascended to the throne of heaven,

That he might rule over all things

As Lord and King'

Christ as King

is an image that sits

at the heart of the Christian tradition.

But this particular feast day

Is relatively new

And the origins of this day

Feel very relevant this year

When we have just commemorated

The 100th Anniversary of the Armistice

The event which ended the first World War

On the eleventh of November 1918

On twenty third of December 1922,

the new Pope

Pope Pius the eleventh,
Wrote in his first encyclical:

‘One thing is certain today.
Since the close of the Great War

individuals, the different classes of society,
the nations of the earth
have not as yet found true peace.
They do not enjoy, therefore,
that active and fruitful tranquillity
which is the aspiration
and the need of mankind.’

He continued
‘true peace can only be found
under the Kingship of Christ as "Prince of Peace’

three years later in 1925
the Pope instituted the Feast of Christ the King

Now, and this may just be me
I have a bit of a problem
Relating to the imagery
Of Christ the King

Because in the West
we don't really have kings today
not in the sense of total rulers

and my understanding of Kings
is based on history, stories and films

Aragorn in Lord of the Rings
Numerous Kings and Queens
In Game of Thrones
Henry the Eighth in Wolf Hall

Each of these
Gives a sense of something about kingship
A sense of kings as people
Who hold total authority in their domain
Authority which they exercise
In good and less good ways

Christ as King
is an image that sits
at the heart of the Christian tradition

but the Lord as King
was a feature of the Jewish understanding
Of the nature of God

Today's psalm begins
The Lord is King,
and hath put on glorious apparel:
the Lord hath put on his apparel,
and girded himself with strength.

The tradition of the warrior king of Israel
Personified in King David
Was the template for the Messiah

The Lord's anointed one

The Messiah who would save

The Lord's covenant people

The Messiah who would drive out

The enemies of Israel

The Messiah who would restore the Kingdom

Ruling on behalf of the Lord

In this morning's first reading

The prophet Daniel describes

That sort of figure

'I saw one like a human being
coming with the clouds of heaven.

Who was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him'.

This king has authority

He has a domain

Where his rule is absolute

And he imposes his rule on his people

And they serve the King

But today's New Testament readings

From Revelation and from John's Gospel

Suggest something very different

In Revelation we read of

A king who loves us

and freed us from our sins by his blood
a King who sacrifices himself
for God's people
Today's passage from John's Gospel
describes the events
Which will lead inexorably to Jesus' death
Pilate the Roman overlord
The man with power in this place
asks Jesus
'Are you the King of the Jews'

And Jesus answers obliquely
'My kingdom is not from this world
I came into the world,
to testify to the truth.
Everyone who belongs to the truth
listens to my voice.'

No wonder Jesus was a disappointment
To the people of Israel
People who were waiting
For a very different messiah

Pius the eleventh wrote
In the decade after The first world war

'the nations of the earth
have not as yet found true peace
true peace can only be found
under the Kingship of Christ
the Prince of Peace'.

In some ways it feels
That not much has changed
Over the intervening years

There are wars
And rumours of wars
Many people do not enjoy,
active and fruitful tranquillity

which all sounds a bit depressing
and then I remember
That the Gospel is good news

And for me
it is often literature and stories
Which help me find
that good news

Many of you will be familiar with
C S Lewis's children's books
'The Chronicles of Narnia'
About a different world
A different kind of kingdom

Rowan Williams
The former Archbishop of Canterbury
Reflected on these works
In his book 'The Lion's world'

And wrote of the way
in which Lewis manages to give an idea
of what life in a kingdom

with an incarnate lord
Might be like

Williams explores Lewis' key themes:
the exhilaration of an encounter
with the Divine 'other',
the avoidance of self-delusion,
and the joy of the surprising discovery of God.

On this feast of Christ the king
We are looking for that sense
Of exhilaration and joyful discovery
In today's Gospel

The gospel of John
Begins with the prologue:
'And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth'

and goes on to describe a king
who comes to serve
who washes his disciples feet

a Gospel which ends
with Jesus reconciling Peter with himself
Peter, the disciple who has denied him'

So when Jesus responds to Pilate
With the words
'For this I was born,

and for this I came into the world,
to testify to the truth.
Everyone who belongs to the truth
listens to my voice.'

We have the Good News

Because we are all here
Because at some point
In some way
We have heard Jesus call us to follow him

We have listened to his voice
Heard his invitation
And have chosen
To be subject to his just and gentle rule

In the kingdom of God
The only kingdom
Where true peace will be found

The king and the kingdom
We are called to share
With the world

Amen