

Christ the King Sunday
22-11-2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24 I the Lord will sort and look after my Sheep

Psalm 100 Shout for Joy to the Lord

Ephesians 1:15-23 I pray you will continue in Christ
Who is Lord over All

Matthew 25: 31-46 The Final Judgement
Separating the Sheep from the Goats
Feeding the Hungry, Caring for the Sick

Introduction

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. In Christian terms this is a relatively new feast. It was only instigated in 1925, by Pope Pius the 11th. He called for this day to acknowledge Christ as King, in the face of rising dictatorships in Europe. In our current age of self centred consumerism and materialism I think it is good to have a specific reminder of the all embracing authority of Jesus Christ as King of the Universe.

But in doing this we need to be mindful that Jesus is a different King. A King who leads us to seek His peace, in His Kingdom.

I'd like to look at two points today.

Firstly what do we think of when we hear the word King.

And secondly, how do we see Jesus as a King, especially in light of today's readings.

The word King

To acclaim Jesus as King might seem like a normal thing to do in church, and so it should, but what do we think about when we hear the word King?

2000 years ago in the time of Jesus to be a king meant to rule with absolute power over one's subjects. There was generally no concept of what our modern democracy might now entail, so to be a king then, was in some cases to have Godlike power.

But in the 21st century what do we think of when we hear the word King. Do we think of Prince Charles waiting patiently, or of his son William being groomed in readiness? Or maybe even little Prince George.

Or do we think of other leaders who hold power in our society, such as our own Prime Minister Scott Morrison, or America's Donald Trump or now Joe Biden. Or maybe we think of Rulers of a bygone era. Kings who lived in castles or palaces. Kings who wore fine robes and crowns adorned in jewels. Kings who held lavish banquets and only associated with the elite.

All of these images might be true to certain degree's, for some of us, but none of them really seem to fit with the Jesus of the gospels.

Jesus as King

We have learned to embrace God as all-loving, all-caring, and all-forgiving. On this Christ the King Sunday we might imagine God as a the ultimate benevolent ruler—one who takes care of his subjects and provides a peaceful, safe, and satisfying environment. Wouldn't we be pleased with a ruler who welcomes everyone, outcasts and all, who tended to the needs of those who are most vulnerable, and who healed the sick? Wouldn't we love to have a king who takes care of all this for us?

Yet this is not the image we have before us today.

Jesus sets the scene for what he is about in the words recorded when he begins his public ministry.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says

"Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is near"

and in Mark's gospel he says

"The time has come . The kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the Good News."

The Christ as King that we experience in today's Gospel reading is one who doesn't do everything for us but one who gives the work back to the people. And further to this we also see is a king who is willing to judge his subjects by how well they do the work that he gives them to do.

Jesus does this through a parable about a godly requirement that we engage in ministry to the oppressed and under-served of our time. Through it, we are reminded that his is a Gospel of love, justice, and mercy offered to us as a discipline for our lives.

Jesus is clear that if we are to accept him as Lord and King of our lives, we have to make His way the purpose of our lives—that we will do the work of tending to the needs of others. In the most precise terms, he outlines what is expected from those who hope to share in his heavenly reign.

We must remember though that it is not good habits that lead to a lively Christian faith, but rather the opposite.

It is a lively Christian faith that leads to good habits.

The choice between the two ways that Christ offers his followers is what will separate us from permanently living within or without the king's presence. In

today's gospel we are given the image of sheep and goats. Sheep are usually white, whereas goats are usually black or coloured, so Jesus is trying to make out there will be a clear distinction.

Those who would walk in his way, do the work he has given us to do. They will choose to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison. The un-faithful, who do not connect with the values of this godly kingdom, will choose to ignore the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison.

The faithful will see everyone as a brother or sister in Christ and will respond to the need to care for all God's children. The un-faithful will keep to themselves and cling to what they have, remaining safe from the risk of contamination by the vulnerable and unwashed. The faithful will enter the realm of this ruler, and the unfaithful will be cast into utter punishment.

The rewards are great for connection with the king—for those who do so will, by embracing this kingly purpose, receive power and meaning in their lives. They will walk their days with a savior king who transforms them again and again into a people who take joy in helping others. They will delight in working to change oppressive systems and human structures that fail to serve the needy. They will work to ensure systems that relieve troubled lives and care for broken spirits.

On the other hand, the all-too human and natural choice of ignoring this power and failing to use what we have been given for the sake of others will deny us the joy and meaning that we can find in serving God's kingdom. God's call is for us to take the resources he has given us, and use them for the good of the weak and powerless. God's judgment is reserved for those of us who fail use our gifts for good.

It is not easy for us to accept a parable of judgment like the one we have heard today. It is necessary, though, for us to understand the truth of its meaning.

Today, Jesus teaches us that when we stand before God, we will not be asked how well we worshiped in church, but how well our worship transformed us into people who actively cared for those in need.

Conclusion

The focus of Christ the King Sunday makes us mindful to stand before God by making a positive, unqualified, declaration of faith that Jesus Christ is the king—the supreme ruler of our lives—the one to whom we stand and sit and walk and act in obedience. Let our prayer this day be that we may have the courage and the commitment to become more and more a part of the reign of God described in today's parable.