

Christ the King Sunday
26-11-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24	I the Lord will sort and look after my Sheep
Psalms 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 is Christ the King Sunday.

A day in our church calendar set aside to intentionally acknowledge Jesus as our King, but the overwhelming image we have from today's bible readings is that of a good shepherd, sorting the sheep.

So today I would like to look at some of these images of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the King, and how we might see them, and how we might respond to them, in light of Jesus being our King.

Images of Shepherd and King

Let us begin by thinking about these images of Jesus.

Firstly, the image of the Good Shepherd. This is a familiar image of Jesus for us, as it is a very biblical image. Jesus lived in an agrarian society. The stories and parables he told matched his surroundings and shepherds were very much a part of that. Jesus used this imagery of the Good Shepherd as it was already a common motif in the Jewish scriptures, notably the 23rd Psalm – The Lord is my Shepherd.

When we think of a good shepherd, it is no doubt filled with very positive images, even if we may not see or experience shepherds or sheep in our daily lives. We visualize images of care and of sheep being looked after. With this image we probably envisage the shepherd as having the best interests of the sheep at heart. After all it is the shepherd's job description to look after the sheep. I recall a lady telling me a story of when she visited her missionary daughter in Pakistan, and she saw a man walking up a valley with a sheep over his shoulders, just as the sun was setting. She told me how the care she visibly witnessed gave her a much greater sense of what it was for Jesus to be our Good Shepherd.

And then there is the image of a King. When we think about kings, we are probably more drawn to images of power. And because power in our world is so commonly abused, we are less likely to have such positive images when we think of the word

King. When we think of those in positions of power in our world today, we can witness leaders being self absorbed, and seeking to stay in power at the expense of those whom they are leading.

But power can, and is, used for good. This last week marked 60 years since the assassination of the American President JF Kennedy, and although all politicians can use power in positive and negative ways, I believe when he gave the speech which said, "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country", he used his power to inspire people to do good.

But of course, we know that Jesus is a leader different to any leader that the world had experienced at the time, and different to any leader that the world has known since. Jesus used his power for our good. Jesus blended power and care for our benefit, and for the benefit of the whole world.

That's why our Collect Prayer today begins with the words,

"God of Power and Love"

And that is why there are so many images for God and Jesus throughout the bible and in the history of the church. God is bigger and better than we can even begin to imagine and to restrict God to a single image would not do God justice. Whilst it may be difficult for us to view images of power and love together, it is very right to view God in this way.

Jesus as our King

So, what does it mean for us then, if Jesus is to be our king?

In a worldly sense, to be a king is to have a kingdom. And in a Kingdom, there are usually subjects, who's role it is, to be obedient to the king.

To have Jesus as our king, is to be obedient to Jesus above all else.

This is not just something we can compartmentalize as a separate part of our lives, but rather acknowledging Jesus as our King will encompass both the length and breadth of our lives.

It is a massive commitment, but it is the best thing we can do with our lives.

And living with Jesus as our King does not necessarily make for an easy life.

No society in our world has ever been perfectly Christian. That will only occur when Jesus returns. But here in Australia, we have moved in the last century, from a society which generally accepted that Christianity was a positive part of our common life, to now in 2023, where those nominating Christianity on the census has dropped below 50%, and Christianity is often maligned in the public square.

And of course, we are always so busy. There is so much in the world around us that competes for our time and attention. We live in a society where so many things are prioritized, and God is not. It will be countercultural for us to live with Jesus as our King.

Living with Jesus as our king will take dedication and commitment. But living with Jesus as our King, brings us into the joy of being part of God's Kingdom forever. Having Psalm 100 today fits so well, because being part of God's kingdom leads us to praise and joy.

What does it look like if Jesus is our King?

What does it look like if Jesus is our King?

Living with Jesus as our king will involve spending time reading our bibles, spending time in prayer, and spending time gathering to praise and worship God together. But that is not where it ends.

We are called to be obedient to Jesus and do these things, not just for themselves, but so that they might strengthen and encourage us, to show God's love to the world around us.

In today's Gospel reading, we have a very stark reminder, of what we are to called into as Christians:-

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Welcome the stranger
- Give clothes to the naked
- Care for the sick
- Visit those in prison

Living with Jesus as our King will mean we prioritize our relationship with God, so that we will be enabled to show God's love to those around us. Just as Jesus used the image of the Good Shepherd for himself, we are also called to model our lives on the life of Jesus and be Good Shepherds to others.

God won't necessarily expect us to be doing everything on that list. I know because I don't visit those in prison. I'm leaving that to my mum, who is a volunteer prison chaplain at this point in time. But we are all called to share in the work of the Christian Faith Community.

As Christians we know that God's salvation comes to us by faith, through grace.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel reading, remind us explicitly, about the tasks, that having faith in Jesus, will draw us into. If Jesus is our king, then we are called to be loyal subjects, and carry out the works expected in God's kingdom.

Conclusion

Today we celebrate Christ the King, coming together to acknowledge who Jesus is, and all that he has done for us.

We have the image of the Good Shepherd alongside the image of the King.

And as we acknowledge the Kingship of Jesus, we acknowledge that we are in turn called to live as God's subjects and to share God's love with those around us.

As we praise God today, as we are filled with the joy of knowing God's grace in our lives, as we come to worship Jesus as our King, may we be strengthened and enabled to be people who care, so that the love of God will be known in us.

Amen.