

## Sermon 25 November 2018 Christ the King

### Revelation 1:4b-8 and John 18:33-37

How many of you are older than 66 and a half? Those of us who are younger have never sung 'God save the King'. In my profession senior barristers have the title Queen's Counsel, not King's Counsel. But regardless of the gender of our monarch, the idea of kingship in the twentieth century is very different from that of Biblical times.

Where kings and queens do still exist, they operate within a carefully defined framework, being constitutional monarchs rather than absolute monarchs. They can only bring subtle pressure to bear on politicians. Prince Charles is reported as having said, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, that, when king, he will not meddle in politics, saying: 'I am not that stupid. I do realise that it is a separate exercise being the sovereign'.

I suggest we have to look at some of the world's current dynastic presidents to see what kingship looked like in Bible times. Anyone who saw the documentary series on President Assad of Syria will have seen how power is won through warfare and how it is held onto through violence and fear and passed from father to son. Such 'kings' are all powerful and are like those of biblical times.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor. He sees in front of him a poor man, from a poor part of the country, whose followers have all run away. He knows this man cannot be a king, but he also knows that a week previously Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey, almost a parody of a conquering hero, and those watching had called out 'blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel'. At the very least, he would have been afraid that Jesus was going to make some political statement that might hurt his position as Governor. And if you remember, the story of Jesus starts with the Magi asking for directions to the new born 'King of the Jews', maybe his advisors have reminded him of that.

And so he asks the question: Are you the King of the Jews? And Jesus does, what he does most often, he answers with another question. Why do you say that, what put that idea into your head? Jesus then goes on to agree that he does have a kingdom, but that his kingdom is not from this world. It's worth noting that those of you who are familiar with the authorised version, the King James version, will be used to hearing that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. That has led readers to a conclusion that Jesus is talking about heaven, some other worldly or future kingdom that has nothing to do with this present world. The NRSV and other modern translations, instead say that Jesus' kingdom is not from this world. That fits with the words that Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer that his kingdom would come on earth as well as in heaven.

So, if Jesus' kingdom is not from this world, what does that mean? The Old Testament and the gospels show us again and again that this world is the source of evil and rebellion against God. Jesus' kingdom is about bringing truth into this world. Not the sort of truth that is about a logical argument or about honesty, or even about whose memory is correct. For those of you with siblings, how often do you find that your memory about the truth of an event is entirely different from the version your sister or brother remembers?

Pilate knows and understands about political truth, the sort that today we would say comes from the barrel of a gun, or my power against your weakness.

Jesus is talking about a different sort of truth and a different sort of kingdom.

Truth is what we see when we see God.

John, writing in Revelation says that Jesus is the one who is and was and is to come. The Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the one who loves us and who made us to be a kingdom, to be priests serving God.

So we are not just saved or rescued by Jesus, we have important work to do in the kingdom of God, here and now.

If we want to live in the kingdom we will have to recognise that Jesus the King sets the standards. Not standards of power, of violence to hold onto power, but standards of love. To love all the things that God has made, children, men, women, the joyous, the broken, the hopeful and the despairing. To love others is to love those made in God's image.

To remember that Jesus spent his time with the marginalised, the oppressed and the forgotten. He was and is utterly committed to those who are not valued or respected by this world. The hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner.

And so, although Jesus is not seeking political power in secular terms, he does speak to the world and its system of governance. And he speaks to us about how we can see the kingdom of God and how we can make it happen in the world, in little steps.

Concerns about ecology, peace among people and nations, economic justice, equality, refugees and land rights, issues covered by our 'come as you are' series, are things that are of deep concern to a kingdom of love, a kingdom that is both on earth and in heaven.

I am aware that the Christian church can make an idol out of doing, of being active. For many of us here, we have reached the end of our 'doing' days or we may be naturally contemplative. For others here, we still have energy to commit ourselves to volunteering, to standing up for justice in our workplaces, to ministering to the marginalised, oppressed and forgotten.

Wherever we are, we can bring the kingdom of God into this world by caring, by enjoying life, by being fair to each other, by smiling at those around us, by challenging each other, by trying to see each other with the love that God feels for each of us.

So let's go,

Let's do it, and let's do it now,

Without waiting for tomorrow.

Let us celebrate the call of Christ the King, whose kingdom has no end and let us announce the kingdom of God.

Amen

**Sarah Thomas 25 November 2018**