

Sermon for Sunday 24 November

Christ the King

**Daniel 7: 9 – 10, 13 – 14; Revelation 1: 4b – 8;
John 18: 33 – 37**

I happened to drop in recently to an episode of Wolf Hall on TV. I didn't watch for long. But there was Henry VIII, sitting on his throne in a ridiculous 'Turkish' costume of which he seemed to be rather fond. Not even his fixer, Thomas Cromwell dared to tell him that he looked very silly. Such, I suppose, is the power of an absolute monarch!

There has been much discussion in recent days about power, and the misuse or abuse of power in the Church of England. Sadly, it seems, in any human organisation, there will always be those who seek power for their own ends rather than for the good of others.

Today, on the last Sunday of the Church's year, before we begin Advent, we're invited to think about another kind of power. About Christ the King. What kind of a king is Jesus, and what kind

of a kingdom does he bring? What does that mean for us as we seek to follow Him?

Each of our readings give us some clues. Our first, from the Book of Daniel, gives us a glimpse into the throne room of heaven. Here is the Ancient One, or the Ancient of Days enthroned with thousands upon thousands of servants before him. It seems to be a court scene. Then one 'like a human being' is presented to the Ancient One, and is given dominion and glory, and kingship for ever over all peoples and nations. Our reading from Revelation also takes us to heaven, and shows us Jesus, who is described as the 'faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.' Jesus is the one who loves us, who freed us from our sins by dying for us on the Cross. Because of this we have a new status and new access to God; we are all now made priests in God's kingdom, serving God the Father. All of us, as baptised Christians, are called to service in His kingdom.

In our Gospel reading it's Pilate who raises the question of kingship. He knows, as do the Jewish authorities, that if Jesus claims to be a king that will be enough to condemn him. But Jesus refuses

to be drawn on this, saying instead that his 'kingdom' is not of this world. If it were, wouldn't his followers be fighting to defend Him? Instead, he says he was born to testify to the truth.

In this conversation Pilate represents earthly kingship and power – the enormous and far-reaching power of the Roman Empire. To Pilate kingship and power go together. But what Jesus is offering is a picture of truth – or you might say of the reality on which everything hangs – that God the Father, the Alpha and Omega, the eternal one, is like Jesus. This is why Revelation calls Jesus 'the faithful witness'. The strange human obsession with power is an aberration from the truth of a loving God. If Jesus represents the truth any other human notion of kingship is falsehood and will fail. Jesus represents the God who wants to rule by love, not power. He offers to his followers a revelation of God that strips away delusion and self-centredness and draws human beings into relationship with God. Into worship and humble service. It absolutely cuts across and draws into question all of our human power-structures and hierarchies.

This is costly, because it requires that each one of us stops trying to be king of our own little kingdom and that we put God at the centre of our lives instead.

No wonder Pilate is so disturbed. No wonder he decides Jesus is too inconvenient and has to be disposed of.

I'm going to finish by reading you something written by someone else which I think puts very well the impact of Jesus on the world. You may know it.

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned--put together--have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one, solitary life.

Attributed to James Allen Francis

That is Christ, our King. Amen