

Sermon for Sunday 21 November 2021

Christ the King

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

What Kind of a King is Jesus?

Today is the last Sunday in the Church's year before we begin again with Advent next Sunday. We finish the year by turning our gaze to Christ the King. And our Bible passages today invite us to reflect on 'What kind of a king is Jesus?'

Our ideas of kingship – or rather monarchy – are probably related to our Queen – Elizabeth – who has now reigned for approaching 70 years. We shall we hope be celebrating her Platinum Jubilee next year. She is now the longest reigning British Monarch, although not quite yet the longest reigning monarch anywhere in the world. She is the embodiment of stability. Most of us won't remember any other monarch in our lifetimes. She's a figure of wisdom too – and great Christian faith; of integrity. Someone

who has great influence and who is highly respected, despite not carrying political power.

The experience of the people of Israel was very different. God wanted to be their king, to rule them directly, with help from His chosen leaders, but they asked for an earthly King instead, so that they could be the same as the nations around them (1 Samuel 8). God gave them what they asked for and let them find out for themselves how it worked out. Some kings were better than others. The first king, Saul, was not a success. His successor David brought both successes and failures. After Solomon the nation fragmented, and parts of it were lost for ever. By the time of Jesus they had a puppet king, King Herod of Judea, who was subservient to the Romans and generally hated.

The Princess of Wales was famously asked in an interview whether she thought she would ever be Queen. She said this "I'd like to be a queen of people's hearts, in people's hearts, but I don't see myself being the queen of this country" She

seems to have been envisaging – hoping for – a different kind of monarchy.

When God finally sends Jesus, it's to be a very different kind of King from any King who had ever been before. That is one of the reasons why so many people couldn't grasp what He meant and still can't. A crucified King, alone and deserted by His followers, makes no sense.

Our passage from Revelation, coming out of John's reflection on the whole story of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, helps us to see much more than this. Jesus is the 'faithful witness', the one who shows us in human form what God is like. Because Jesus didn't stay dead, but rose again, Jesus is the 'firstborn of the dead'; He breaks the power of death for ever. We too shall follow Him; our dying too will lead to our rising to new life. Jesus has freed us from our sins by His death and brought about the kingdom of God. We are all now freed to serve God as priests in this new kingdom. Jesus is already the ruler of all of the

kings of the earth. And one day He will come again to judge the earth.

But none of this comes about without suffering. Jesus came to share in all that it means to live a human life. He knew hunger and thirst, tiredness, disappointment and loss. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus accepted the will of God that He would suffer and die. So we have a King who understands our suffering and our joys, who knows what it means to go through dark times.

The disciples must have thought it had all gone wrong when they saw Jesus crucified. Either they had made a big mistake trusting Jesus, or God wasn't as powerful as they thought and didn't know what He was doing. There are times in our lives too when we wonder, Did God know what he was doing? Is He really in charge? I'd like to read you some words written by Ann Lewin which I've found very helpful. She is wrestling with her mother's suffering and asking why God does not always seem to answer our

prayers by intervening to change things. Here's what she says:

“Gradually I came to a fresh understanding. I had been brought up with a vocabulary which only used words like almighty, powerful, omnipotent, in connection with God. I needed new words, like vulnerable and suffering. An all-powerful God who makes people suffer, or who acts capriciously, would not be a God worth worshipping. But a God who has made himself vulnerable by offering us responsibility, and giving us free will; who suffers with us, and is brought to his knees with us, and who continually brings new life out of dead ends, that's a God I can relate to. Not obviously omnipotent, but skilled in crisis management. God's will is that people should be whole, and his will is constantly thwarted by illness, suffering, loss and death. And in all this, God suffers too, helping us to bear the pain and find signs of hope.”

As Revelation says, Jesus has made us all priests, serving in His kingdom. Ann Lewin goes on to

say: “Perhaps that's what taking up our Cross means: being faithful to our commitment to the God we worship, finding God in the midst of whatever life throws at us.”¹

Which takes us back to our collect, which I'm going to pray again -

“God the Father, help us to hear the call of Christ the King and to follow in his service, whose kingdom has no end; for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, one glory.”
Amen

¹ Ann Lewin, *Seasons of Grace*, p242-243