

Christ the King
21st November 2021
Revelation 1: 4b-8 and Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14

Unbelievable though it may seem, we have reached the end of another church year where Christ the King is celebrated. We finish the year reflecting on what it means to say that Christ is King, before next week beginning to look forward to his entering the world as a tiny, vulnerable human baby and to his return to us. It's enough to give you theological whiplash! Celebrating Christ the King reminds us that as Christians, Christ should rule in our hearts and minds, and in our lives.

Christ the king is sovereign, and is sovereign over all our lives. What exactly does that mean? If we say we have faith in Christ, if we say we follow him and are his disciples, if we say that through faith in him we have eternal life, if we say that he died that we might live what we are actually saying is that we dedicate our lives to him. We give him sovereignty, authority, and supremacy over our lives. That we subject our lives to his will. That we are obedient and will follow his purposes for our lives. That we will model our lives on his. That we will serve him and his people. That's quite some commitment!

Let's go back to the temptation of Christ. In that story, the devil took Jesus up into a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory and said: "All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me." (Matthew 4:9). The devil had claimed to Jesus that he had been given all authority of the kingdoms of the earth, and it was his suggestion that, if Jesus would strike a bargain with him, he would give Jesus a share in them. The amazing thing is that what the devil promised Jesus – and could never have given him – Jesus won for himself by the suffering of the cross and the power of the resurrection. Not compromise with evil, but the unswerving loyalty and the unflinching love which accepted the cross brought Jesus his universal kingship.

Both readings today give us a continuum of time. The name Daniel gives to God the Father is Ancient of Days. The very name conjures up images of longevity and a feeling that he has always been. Daniel refers to Jesus as the Son of man who was led into the presence of God and was given authority, glory and sovereign power over all God's people – all of whom from every nation and tongue worshipped him. What we sometimes overlook is that every person on the planet, past, present and future is one of God's children and will one day worship him.

Jesus the king died in humiliation and shame, willingly doing so in order that we might have life. A king who sacrificed himself for his people. A king who lived a humble life devoted to the service of the oppressed, the poor, the outcast. A king who never once abused the power he had been given and whose only concern was reconciling his people back to the Father, so ensuring that "they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). A king who turned on its head any and all ideas and expectations then and now about how kings behaved and lived. No wealth, no splendour, no servants (he was the servant!), no armies. King of love and prince of peace!

At the beginning and end of the passage from Revelation, John also stresses the eternal nature of God's reign – "him who is, and who was, and who is to come" (verses 4 and 8). Let's break that down:

Who is – reigns over us now; who was – reigned over the earth from before the beginning of time; is to come – continues to reign into the future. He was before time began; he is now; and he will be when time ends. He has been the God of all who have trusted in him; he is the God in whom at this present moment we can put our trust; and there can be no event and no time in the future which can separate us from him. His reign is eternal.

In this short opening John manages to unveil a good deal of what he believes about God and Jesus, and about his purposes. Jesus is the one who, through his death and resurrection, has accomplished God's

purpose. His love for his people, his liberation of them by his self-sacrifice, his purpose for them (not just to rescue them, but to put them to important work in his service) – all these are stated here briefly in verse 6. And, not least, Jesus is the one who will soon return to complete the task, to set up his rule on earth as in heaven. Paul expresses the never changing nature of Christ and his reign in Hebrews 13:8 – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever”.

If you listen carefully to verse 5 you hear that Jesus **loves** us. John uses the present tense. In other words, not only is the kingdom eternal but also that the love of God in Christ Jesus is continuous. Not that in one moment in time God loved us (past tense) so much that he sacrificed his son to free us from sin, but that his love for us is as present and as eternal as his kingdom.

When it comes to Christ the King the whole world owes allegiance to him – even if some don’t know it yet! Daniel and John have given us a vision of the future when God’s kingdom will fully cover the earthly and heavenly realms, when man’s relationship with God is fully restored and every person of every nation will gladly show allegiance to him. In the meantime, we are reminded that despite our fall from grace, Christ still reigns in the here and now not just in some unknown future time.

Verse 14 in the Daniel reading should also be a source of reassurance for us. In this modern world where everything seems to be in turmoil – where wars rage, tyrants rule, foreign governments use chemical weapons on our streets, and where it feels as though terrorists hold sway, we can look to Christ the King for permanence and security “His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

None of us can be sure about what might happen in the world today. These passages tell us that we should not fear because Christ’s kingdom is eternal and will never be overthrown. It is indestructible however fragile we might fear the state of Christianity is today. It will

never completely collapse. So, in Christ we have a king and a kingdom that are permanent, not temporary, are unchanging and reliable – we can depend on that.

I have some questions for you to reflect on. What does it mean to be a subject of Christ the King? What duties and responsibilities does that bring us? How are we to be good citizens of Christ's kingdom?

The most obvious answer, though not the easiest is to model our lives on Jesus himself. Jesus's model of kingship was one of service and self-sacrifice. In serving our fellow human beings as Christ himself did we are in fact serving him. When we show kindness and compassion as he did, when we reach out to those in need as he did, when we speak out against injustice as he did, we are being good citizens of his kingdom and are serving him through service to his people. In serving others we are making it known through word and deed that Christ is our king. When we know that Christ's kingdom and love for us is present now and eternal, how can we not share that amazingly good news with those who don't know it yet? When we allow Christ to rule in our hearts, in our minds and in our lives, we can't help but share the Good News of his everlasting kingdom and love.