

Feast of Christ the King — David Kent— 22.11.20

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

The first thing I want to do this morning is share with you our joy at the arrival of our latest grandchild. Our first grandson Joe David born at 2.36 am last Wednesday the 18th November, the same day as his cousin Rosie who was 15 that day. Named after his maternal great-grandad and his grandpa (me). It's 45 years, almost to the day, since I witnessed the birth of our own son Matthew on the 7th November and I recall, like it was yesterday, the overwhelming sense of miracle both Pam and I felt at that moment. It really is wonderful to witness our own son experiencing that same sense of miracle, that awe and wonder as his wife Sarah gave birth to this tender and fragile new life.

Children truly are a gift from God and I can imagine God experiencing the same feelings we are experiencing of overwhelming love and joy and protection and nurture for his new creation, baby Joe. Be prepared for the odd bulletin appearing in future sermons.

It seems very appropriate that this Sunday we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Ruler of all His creation. I imagine those of us with Netflix have been glued to the TV catching the new series of The Crown. If you're like me and Pam, then you'll have been following it from the very beginning, fascinated by the inner workings of the monarch and the palaces and the royal family. Fascinated because their lives are so different from our own, so opulent and sumptuous, so powerful and untouchable, so other-worldly and historical, yet in many ways bound by convention and tradition. Our monarch is what's known as a constitutional monarch these days, but in days gone by they actually ruled the country, made the laws and enforced them.

They raised funds through taxes, they raised armies and fought wars and married for political gain. And of course they always made sure they had an heir to the throne to carry on the ruling dynasty.

For most of us, isn't this is the image we conjure up when we hear the word King? Is the image of a king or a monarch as portrayed in The Crown how we imagine Jesus when we give him the title of Christ the King?

St Paul tries to describe Christ the King in our first reading today when he tells the Ephesian church that "God put His power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, and above every name that is named...and he has put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things for the church." So whether or not we call him King, Paul leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is the boss. But what does that mean?

In an earlier part of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says this to the disciples "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Passages such as these give rise to the term servant king which we often apply to Jesus.

And you'll all remember that wonderful scene at the last supper when Jesus washes his disciples feet. What kind of a king washes his subjects feet? And of course the kingdom of God clearly needs a king, but if Christ is King where does that leave God?

So when we celebrate the festival of Christ the King, what image does it conjure up in your mind? And why?

Let me share my current take on Christ the King with you. I think of Jesus as sovereign over my mind through his teaching, I think of Jesus as sovereign over my heart through his love and I think of Jesus as sovereign over my life by setting me his example to live by.

So today I thank God for making Jesus sovereign over every aspect of my life, even though I frequently wander from the path he sets before me. I see it as a way to travel, rather than a destination, a work in progress.

In today's gospel reading we hear the famous story of God separating the sheep from the goats and it's a most powerful story isn't it, guaranteed to make us all wonder which group we might eventually find ourselves in?

A passage that will have us searching through our recent past to see if we have fed and watered and clothed and visited those in need. And perhaps ending up feeling guilty?

But what if this story isn't so much about assigning reward or punishment or deciding our eternal destination? What if it's more to do with pushing us to look at the truth of our lives, to look at the choices we make, and to be aware that our choices matter. The people gathered for judgment in today's gospel have no idea what difference they are making. They are just going on about their lives. One cared for the least of these and the other didn't. They seem oblivious as to the consequences or effects of their actions. They both ask the same question. "When did we see you?"

So let's not hear this story as a final judgment on our lives. Let's rather hear it as a wake up call. Let it be the chance to see ourselves through the eyes of one of the least of these.

What do they see? Is that who we want to be? What choices will lead us on the path of light?

What choices will help us discover the light and beauty within ourselves and within the other person? That light and beauty describe who we most authentically are.

But I also know that that light and beauty can be cruelly tested by the vulgar, the ugly, the impoverishment, and the violence in our world. And yet the choice remains; light or darkness. Who and how do we want to be? What will we choose?

What if we actually managed to approach every person, every place, every circumstance, every choice as if we see Christ, and if we don't, if we can't see Christ, what if we approached every person, every place, every circumstance, every choice, as if Christ sees us? Either way there is a seeing taking place. What if we allowed those seeings to push us deep into ourselves to uncover, rediscover, or maybe even discover for the first time, the light that is who we most truly are, and in that light we made our next choice?

Some years ago there was a lot of publicity about fake beggars.

I remember one occasion when a young woman was filmed being dropped off in a Mercedes before taking up her begging site. There were stories of beggars making hundreds if not thousands per week and we were encouraged not to encourage them by giving. I thought a great deal about this and I finally decided that giving to those begging in the street was as much about me as much as it was about them. If they chose to cheat me, that was their problem. Whether or not I chose to give was about who I am and about my spirit of generosity and desire to help others. Who am I to make judgments.

Of course I will often offer to fetch food rather than give money and a while ago I offered to do just that for a young woman sitting on the pavement near the entrance to the Kingsgate Centre

I asked her if she would like a coffee and she said she would, she'd like a skinny latte, and while I was at it, would I get her a pizza slice from Greggs. And she described the particular topping she would like. I thought it was hilarious. Even cheeky perhaps. But I am fortunate enough to be able to choose what I eat. Why not afford her the same privilege?

We're called to love our neighbour as ourselves.

We are called to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

We are called to find Christ in everyone we meet

We're called to help even one of these, the least of Christ's brethren.

Because when we do that we do it for Christ

I will end by leaving you with 2 thoughts.

The first came from St Francis of Assisi, via Jeremy Plummer and it is this

"The deeds you do may be the only sermon a person hears today."

And the second is this

"The greatest ministries we ever perform, we never even know about."

Amen.