

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday, November 21, 2021
Readings – Revelation 1:4b-8 & Luke 23:33-43

Today is Christ the King Sunday. Theologically, it is the end of the Church year. Advent begins next week and so today – the Feast of Christ the King - is the last Festival in the Church's calendar.

It is Christ the King Sunday – how strange that our reading is about the crucifixion of Christ! Jesus was mocked while he was on the cross. The soldiers did their best to humiliate him as he hung there. They even hung him between two thieves. These men were criminals, they deserved to be punished for their crimes, but Jesus was innocent, and yet, he hung on a cross in between them, as if he were the worst criminal of all.

How can a Bible reading of Jesus hanging on a cross, with a jeering Roman sign above his head: "The King of the Jews" be appropriate for "Christ the King Sunday?" "What kind of King is this?" What kind of King is Jesus?

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once sought to describe the incarnation of God in Christ. He used this simple illustrative story:

A certain king was very rich. His power was known throughout the world. But he was most unhappy, for he desired a wife. Without a queen, the vast palace was empty.

One day, while riding through the streets of a small village, he saw a beautiful peasant girl. So lovely was she that the heart of the king was won. He wanted her more than anything he had ever desired. On succeeding days, he would ride by her house on the mere hope of seeing her for a moment in passing.

He wondered how he might win her love. He thought, I will draw up a royal decree and require her to be brought before me to become the queen of my land. But, as he considered, he realized that she was a subject and would be forced to obey. He could never be certain that he had won her love.

Then, he said to himself, "I shall call on her in person. I will dress in my finest royal garb; wear my diamond rings, my silver sword, my shiny black boots, and my most colourful tunic. I will overwhelm her and sweep her off her feet to become my bride." But, as he pondered the idea, he knew that he would always wonder whether she had married him for the riches and power he could give her.

Then, he decided to dress as a peasant, drive to the town, and have his carriage let him off. In disguise, he would approach her house. But, somehow the duplicity of this plan did not appeal to him.

At last, he knew what he must do. He would shed his royal robes. He would go to the village and become one of the peasants. He would work and suffer with them. He would actually become a peasant. This he did. And he won his wife.

In a similar way, God consider how he might win humankind. God in Christ became one of us. He took upon him the form of human flesh to dwell among us. Paul says, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

Jesus' Kingdom is different to worldly kingdoms. The Kingdom of Christ is not a kingdom of earthly treasures and palaces. The Kingdom of Christ is an upside down kingdom where the first are last and the King is a servant of his subjects. Referring to himself, Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

What King is this who lays down his life for his subjects?

When the Romans would crucify a criminal it was common for one of the guards to carry a sign that announced the crime that the person was condemned for. In the case of Jesus, no actual crime had been determined, so his official crime was in claiming to be the King of the Jews. "King of the Jews" was the worst thing they could think of to put above his head. They were mocking him with this statement. This sign was meant to be ironic. A king stripped of all his robes and executed in public view is in the wisdom of the world, unimaginable. But Jesus turns the world's wisdom upside down in coming into his Kingdom. His death and resurrection established Christ's eternal authority. Few people reading the sign that bleak afternoon understood the real meaning, but the sign was and is absolutely true. Jesus is King of the Jews, and the Gentiles and the whole universe.

Even the two criminals got involved as one said to Jesus, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal turned to Christ for forgiveness and Jesus accepted him. This shows that it is never too late to turn to God. How awe-inspiring that this dying thief alone saw beyond the present shame to the coming glory. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And he would surely spend eternity in the Kingdom of the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Our reading from Revelation portrays Jesus as an all-powerful King, victorious in battle and glorious in peace.

Our take-home on this Christ the King Sunday is to let the truth about Christ penetrate our lives, deepen our faith in him and strengthen our commitment to follow him no matter the cost.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is, and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Amen.

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