



Sermon for Christ the King, USPG, 2020.

We celebrate today, with Christians all around the world, the feast of Christ the King, the final Sunday of the Christian Year; the culmination of all that we have journeyed through in this liturgical year. But as our Gospel reading reminds us, as is so characteristic of the ministry of Jesus, that kingly reign is not one of a remote monarch, but rather it is lived out in service of the stranger, the destitute, the hungry, the sick and the prisoner.

Today's feast is a relatively new feast in the life of the Church. Gravely concerned by the growing secularism that threatened to obscure any sense that Christ was king of this world, Pope Pius 11th proclaimed it as a new feast day in 1925. It is the pinnacle, the finale, the triumphant ending of the Christian year – Christ is King of all, before we begin the whole cycle again next Sunday as we return to our Advent preparations once again, and prepare to welcome Jesus as a vulnerable baby in a month's time.

Today's feast reminds us that we are given both respect and responsibility in the light of Christ's servant kingship. In baptism, we become members of his family – his royal family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, we are given intrinsic value; the dignity of our birth as human beings has been enhanced by our membership of Jesus' royal family. We are fellow heirs of the Kingdom of God, members of the household of faith, but with this dignity comes responsibility– the responsibility that we heard about in today's Gospel reading.

The passage from Matthew 25 is not a parable, but an apocalyptic vision of the last judgement, and its purpose is ethical instruction. The scene is an enthronement, the Son of Man (Jesus) being installed as King and Judge. Earlier in this chapter we have heard that this `coming` will be as sudden as lightning; it will be on the clouds of glory and with great power; the day and the hour are unknown; it will be a time of reckoning and woe to the unprepared – remember the unprepared bridesmaids in last week's Gospel: a terrifying picture. But now, in today's Gospel comes the full vision, glorious in appearance, cosmic in scope, and yet personal in that every life must appear before the judgement seat.

I think there are three important lessons to be drawn from this story. First, the basis for the final judgement is our response to human need. `For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink` etc. These needs are sadly not unusual – and they can be translated or interpreted into almost every human situation.

Secondly, both those on the right and those on the left are surprised to find themselves where they are. Both the self righteous sinner who finds him or herself on the left, those in Matthew's community who were so busy in their regard for precise religiosity that they failed to notice those in need. And more positively, those on the right – those saints whose service to others is so much a part of their natural behaviour that they are

surprised and embarrassed at the recital of their good deeds and amazed that service to those in need is in fact service to Christ.

Thirdly, the vision reminds us, that service to another is service to Christ, however insignificant the deed or apparently insignificant the person being helped may appear. It is the right of every member of the human family to have this dignity and respect.

This coming season of Advent and Christmas we, through USPG, have the opportunity to respond to this vision in Matthew 25 into a very practical reality, through USPG's Christmas Appeal, 'A Promise of Hope'. A baby born with HIV is unlikely to live to see their fifth birthday. But thanks to a life saving programme run by the Anglican Church in Tanzania at Mvumi Hospital, supported by the USPG Christmas appeal this year, all the babies born as part of the programme are born HIV-free. As one community leader told us, 'The programme has given us power and a new hopeful life.'

I conclude with a short video from this programme, with powerful testimonies from some of the participants, which gives a radical interpretation of Matthew 25: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me'. Or as Rehema, a recipient of the programme in Tanzania puts it: 'This programme has given us another chance to enjoy life that we thought had come to an end'.

Will you join me, on this feast of Christ the King, the one whose kingdom was of service to others, in responding to this need through the USPG's Promise of Hope? For as we do, so we recall too the words of Jesus 'And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me'. Amen.

Video of the programme

Italics – scene on screen

Normal type - the subtitles

(Video starts people singing outside)

Welcome, Welcome.

Welcome USPG, Welcome.

Let us work together to have healthy lives free from HIV and AIDS.

(women and babies in a clinic, above them a sign that states "Mother & Child Health Clinic, Renovation Cost Funded by USPG)

Group of mothers waiting to get Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) services

(woman with a young boy on her knee)

“We are very thankful for these services. We work together with the church, Mvumi hospital and others to provide education on prevention of HIV from mother to child. We educate ourselves at household level to love each other and stop stigma. The programme has given us power and new life. We understand our situation. We are happy!

(woman holding a baby in her arms)

“This project has touched me since 2015, my health was bad, I could not carry 20 litres of water but now I can do all my work. Before many babies and mothers died, now we deliver children that are HIV negative. These services have really helped me. I hope the programme continue to provide education on how to live, breastfeeding and care of our babies so that they cannot be infected with HIV”

(another woman holding a young child)

“I’m happy because I could not do anything, including washing my clothes. I’m very grateful because I can now wash my clothes, I cannot do business because of my disability. I’m really happy because I have a child who is free from HIV”

(video ends with another clip of people singing outside)



www.uspg.org.uk/promiseofhope