

# Christ the King

Sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, St James Lower Hutt, November 20<sup>th</sup> 2016.

Keynote Bible passages: Colossians 1.15 – 20, Revelation 5.11 – 14, Luke 23.33 – 43

Somewhat surprisingly one might consider, a Sunday observance of the theme of Christ the King only dates back to 1925. When the Anglican church adopted the Revised Common Lectionary this day was established as the last Sunday of the church's year.

In instituting this celebration, Pope Pius XI desired a feast that would impact the laity. He regarded it as an observance that would enable believers to 'gain much strength and courage, forming their lives after the true Christian ideal'. The intent was for Christ to 'reign in our minds, ....in our wills, ....in our hearts....in our bodies and in our members.' Such focus reminds us that the kingdom of God is not based on a regional area but portrays the reign or sovereignty or rule of God's nature and purpose in people's lives.

In this sermon there are three aspects of Christ the King on which I invite our own consideration. Interestingly each is described in our hymnody.

First then, *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation*. Christ in creation is an expression of what St Paul attributes '*Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*' (1 Cor 1.24). This aspect has a link with last week's Christ in all creation. Its origins lie in such truths as the Prologue of John: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God'. St Paul's profound insight is of Christ being the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. In Christ all things in heaven and earth were created.' (1.15 – 16).

The Scriptures reveal the Divine will which brought creation and life into being, as Colossians notes 'in Christ all things hold together.' The Psalmist 'earths' this in praise: God is the King of all the earth, sing praises with a psalm'.

As we consider it surely this is a reminder we the subjects of this kingdom have a responsibility to *care for creation* – at least our part of it. Professor Stephen Hawking recently described earth as 'our fragile planet.' As I reflect on life, it truly is 'miracle' and especially so considering the failure to date to find more than possible traces of life anywhere else in the universe. Hawking suggests in the long-term if some extreme earthly misfortune were to occur, humanity needs to find another planet to live on – but such is the vastness of space the nearest would take some 76,000 years to get there. So while SETI goes on, search for extra-terrestrial intelligence we need now to care for the 'blue Planet'. Our task is the 5<sup>th</sup> Face of Mission: to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and celebrate the life of the earth.'

The events of last week, earthquake and storm remind us of the fragility of life. Last week someone posted on Facebook starkly prophetic words from Psalm 46: 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the

sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.' (An appropriate psalm as we sang this morning)

Certainly if climate change is contributing to our changing weather patterns, then more concerted action is needed. A positive in the circumstances last week was how people cared for one another and rescue efforts quickly sprang into action. There I believe we witnessed the prompting of God, a very present help in trouble.

Second, The *King of love* my shepherd is....here is the *kingdom of grace*. Christ who dwells in the hearts and minds of his subjects. The nature of the kingdom was lived by Jesus in his earthly ministry, as he showed love and compassion and mercy. His example was exemplified in healing people, in accepting them, in contrast to society of his day which so easily alienated. Jesus illustrated the nature of this kingdom through parables. His teaching illustrated the 'here and now' aspect of the kingdom – exhorting people to change their ways and believe the good news he was bringing – that news of unconditional love, caring for the last, the lost, and the least.'

As believers seeking to follow in the way of Christ, we are thus subjects under his kingship. We are part of the kingdom of grace, of God's love reaching out to us, and through us to others.

A third feature, from the hymn 'Be thou my vision: *'High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun' - a kingdom of glory*. There's no lack of scripture reference to the 'king of kings and Lord of Lord's.' It is this King who ascended on high and sits at the Father's right hand. This is the king described in the visions of Revelation: 'Worthy is the Lamb to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might ...to the one seated on the throne.....be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever.'

This is the aspect that has drawn composers and poets and artists to such inspiration as climaxed in Handel's Messiah. It's my belief we experience earthly glimpses of the Christ in heavenly glory. It's that which sends shivers down one's spine sensing awareness of being in the very presence of the Divine. I well recall such in visiting and worshipping in great cathedrals of England and France, in gathered celebration praise, or in quiet worship hearing 'the still small voice', attending a concert of superlative music, or standing in an art gallery, given to view famous paintings. Surely most of us can identify with some time we have experienced a sense of God's glory in Christ.

Finally then, today is opportunity for praise of the Divine, Christ the King. We recognise this not only as historical but ever-present, as in the hymn we shall sing 'Christ triumphant, ever reigning, Saviour, Master, King. Lord of heaven our lives sustaining, hear us as we sing, ...' And thus may we pray as the Collect of today: May all in heaven and earth never cease to praise you, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.