

'To the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory'

Christ the King

Sermon Message by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, November 19 2010

Keynote Bible Readings: Revelation 5.11 – 14, Jeremiah 23.1 - 6

In August, while on a trip to England I attended a Sunday Service in St Paul's London, a truly emotional-spiritual experience. Before the service began, the 'warm-up' with the peel of the bells was moving in itself. Then to walk into such a historic and worship-inspiring building brought shivers down my spine and tears in my eyes. One could think back to the history of St Paul's built after the great fire of London, and its miraculously surviving the blitz of World War 2. Then also there is the tradition of significant worship in times past, now given to experience it in the 'here and now.' It's that worship-inspiring spine-tingling that occurs too for me most every time I hear the closing chorus of Handel's Messiah: 'Worthy is the Lamb...to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might. To the One who is seated on throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever. Amen! That's the summation of this morning's New Testament Reading, and renders strongly the Theme of '*Christ the King.*'

In some respects it can be difficult for us to appreciate the significance of Christ the King, in the sense that we don't have a king in the Commonwealth, rather a Queen, and she is far away overseas. Not until one goes to England may I suggest is it possible to appreciate the place of kingship, in the palaces and lands and occasions marked by royalty. Thus the Theme of Christ the King has altogether new significance for me after seeing what is there, and what has been in a human expression of royalty. How much more then when one thinks of the place of '*Christ the King?*'

Second, a particular methodology to help parishes these days is what is called NCD, Natural Church Development. It centres round a questionnaire circulated among congregations asking for people's impressions about aspects of the life of the parish. One of the outcomes for many Anglican parishes has been a revealing that they rate low in 'passionate spirituality.' I have no doubt about Anglicans feeling strongly about their faith, and its place in one's life. But being passionate? Or to express it another way, being enthusiastic about one's faith. What place is that? And if we were more passionate, what would we be like? How would it be expressed in worship?

One way is in the conviction of the *responses*, be they said or sung. One especially is that at the invitation: 'Lift up your hearts.' And the reply: 'We lift them to the Lord.' That is, to the worship of Christ the King, as praise accorded in heaven. Thus the Liturgy continues in that

motif, 'together with angels and archangels'...and the worship: 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' To acknowledge Christ the King, and express some passionate spirituality is to heartily and with good voice join in saying or singing praise. After all, surely the angels in heaven are in good voice in their praise of Christ the King.

A third way to acknowledge praise of Christ the King, is to reckon on *his place in our living*. This too can be expressed in worship. I wonder as you come to worship with an expectation: How is God going to speak to me in the worship today? What about in the Sermon Message? Or in another aspect of the Service, the music, readings, word, or in the stillness silent parts? God being very present. That was my experience in quite some intensity in the St Paul's Service. Such is the acoustic of the building I could scarcely make out the words of the preacher. Nor was it the choir, as the regular choir was on holiday, with some singers filling in. What then? I think it was of 'associations' of what the building has stood for, of the sense of worship when towards the front (away from all the tourists roped off at the back), more of the fullness of God's presence being experienced.

Then a fourth way has a *healing context*. In his letter to the early church, James teaches the readers to 'pray the prayer of faith, so that you may be healed.' This has to do with our belief in Jesus, he who is, and what he did for us by dying on a cross and rising again. He is more than a historical figure, rather he is 'saviour' one bringing salvation. That is in a relationship with him. An aspect is believing he can be there for you in whatever your need. That is praying the prayer of faith. So whether it is for healing, for discerning, for guidance, for peace, it is trusting Jesus will truly be there. Interestingly there is allusion to that sovereignty when Jesus sent out the 70 to pray for people's healing. They were to say 'The *kingdom* of God has come near you.' So when you pray, let it be with that utter conviction Jesus will be there and meet you. In that context the prayer of Dorothy Kerin is helpful: God hears and answers every prayer, but makes times and ways his own.' It may be you feel you've not enough faith, may I suggest the honest words of the man to Jesus for his son who was ill: 'Lord I believe, help my unbelief.' [Sometimes in the anxiety and concern it can be difficult to pray for another close to us. Do take opportunity then to ask for prayer as offered in the Communion time in the service].

In summary then, whilst we may but grasp for what the vision of heaven in Revelation was like, with praise of Christ the Lamb upon the throne, it can be 'earthed' and realised to an extent in our human experience, of awe, of presence, and peace given that Christ the King is present for all his commonwealth, including you and me.