

## **Christ the King – 24 November 2024 (Year B)**

**John 18, 33-37/ Rev. 1. 4b-8/Psalm 93**

### **A Sermon by Corinne Craymer, Lay Worship Leader**

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

In the small town of Wissant in the north of France you can find a very stunning crucifix behind the altar of a small church. The crucified Christ is raised on a pole with his arms outstretched, not in the agony of crucifixion but in the manner of blessing those who look on. It is extraordinary because it shows us Christ the King of heaven in the glory of God's saving Grace.

Today is special because we celebrate Christ the King. Next week Advent begins but before then we take a look at the start of the shameful events of Christ's journey into his passion in the gospel of John which we have just heard read.

Jesus has been betrayed, arrested, and now stands before Pilate to answer his concern that Jesus might be a threat to Rome. 'Are you the king of the Jews' he asks. Jesus answers with the truth that his kingdom is not of this world. The kingdom of which Jesus speaks is neither political nor military. He has no allegiance to earthly powers. Those around him do not understand that he is no threat to Rome and they will go on to say we have no king but the emperor, even denying God's kingship.

Jesus never answers Pilate's question and yet the irony is that above the cross for the world to see is the inscription that Pilate has had written in Latin, in Hebrew and in Greek 'Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews'. It's prophetic isn't it? Three languages so that there can be no misunderstanding of what is being said. This is actually the truth that Jesus came to tell us and show us. If only Pilate had known!

John shows us who Jesus is and perhaps his kingship is most visible in his crucifixion. Even in his dying moments Jesus rules over what is happening: he speaks to his Father with clarity and not thinking of himself, cares in that moment for his mother and his beloved disciple John. The truth of Christ's loving servant heart is clear. Truth then seems to be the most important message here. The truth of who Jesus is, the truth about the kingdom, that our love for God and for neighbour as for self are the truth that matters in this life.

Jesus never let the truth of who he is be changed by situations or people. If we are honest with ourselves we might admit that we sometimes show different sides of ourselves in different situations. I know I may have a tendency to be silent when I could speak up more than I do for the values and truth of my life. I suggest that it's hard for us all to be truly authentic all the time. But not Jesus, not ever.

So Jesus standing before Pilate is encountering the powers of this world. We see daily what the powers of this world are doing and it's terrifying for many people. The selfish ambitious powers of the world in which Jesus lives do not begin to understand that his kingship is of an entirely different kind to their idea of what kingly power looks like. So let's look at what God's kingship might mean. What does the landscape of our King's heavenly country look like?

We are promised it is one where selfish ambition will not exist. It is one where sorrow and pain will not exist. It is one where injustice and darkness will not exist.

What does Jesus ask of us in readiness for this?

Firstly we are to look at all our relationships. Those within the family circle and those with colleagues, friends and neighbours. Have we found our servant heart? The Kingdom of God bears no grudges, no anger, for Jesus has become the peaceful kingly gate through which we will pass.

Secondly our values need to resonate with the teachings Jesus has given us. Are we ever ashamed of our choices? Is there anything in our lives we would not wish Jesus to see? Do the moral choices we have made reflect loving attitudes towards others?

Thirdly have we been honest before God? Have we asked for forgiveness when we needed it? Have we let go those earthly sins of pride and greed? Does our faith allow us to trust Him?

I love the story about trust and the little boy who had joined his villagers in prayer for rain for their sun dried crops. People had brought along Bibles, crosses, crucifixes, books with prayers in them and candles lit in faith that God would answer their prayers. Only the little boy took an umbrella with him! I think that's the kind of faith Jesus asks of us.

St Paul wrote to the Philippians when they were being persecuted about this very thing. About citizenship of heaven. They were to shine as lights in this world, imitating Christ's humility and servant heart. One could obtain

citizenship in three different ways: by birth, as a gift or it could be bought. As Christians we have already been given all three privileges. We are born again of water and the Spirit. Citizenship has been purchased at no less cost than the blood of Jesus who bestows it on us by his will as King of kings.

The famous poem by Sir Cecil Spring Rice has something to say about the kingdom we hope one day to go to. I'll finish with the words from the second verse.

'And there's another country I've heard of long ago  
Most dear to them that love her most great to them that know.  
We may not count her armies we may not see her King  
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering  
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase  
And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.

Amen.

**Corinne Craymer**