

John 18.33-37; Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14; Revelation 1.4b-8.
Christ the King - Sunday next before Advent
22nd November 2015
8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Totteridge

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart always be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer (Ps.19:14).

Today is the Sunday next before Advent, the day we celebrate Christ the King and look forward to his coming amongst us. The readings we've just heard are seeded with kingly references of various kinds. In Daniel we hear of 'an Ancient One' taking his spectacular throne – God the Father perhaps? And then, 'one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven... ..to him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.' This Kingship, perhaps that of God the Son (?), is for all eternity, 'an everlasting dominion.'

The Book of Revelation affirms this King of Kings, with direct reference to 'Jesus Christ... ..the ruler of the kings of the earth.' And where do we stand in relation to this mighty King? Well, we are the priests of the kingdom according to John, the John that addresses the Seven Churches of Asia, priests intended to serve the Father of our great high priest, the humble man from Nazareth, the Son of God.

And yet, does Jesus claim the Kingship we celebrate today? Does he turn it to his own earthly advantage and use it to assert his power and authority? Even at a time of great provocation when he is being interrogated by Pilate? This is

the same Pilate whose chief concerns revolve solely around establishing any kind of threat to the rule of Rome. 'Are you the King of the Jews?' he asks. And in response there is no denial because Jesus is not in the slightest bit interested in worldly power. Instead, he claims the kingship of a Kingdom beyond this world, a Kingdom without borders, a Kingdom of truth where his voice does not fail to be heard.

What kind of kingdom can this be, this kingdom 'not from this world.' I find some insight in a piece by the Methodist theologian Howard Snyder from Bishop Alan's book 'Saints & Pilgrims in the Diocese of St. Albans' – it's pinned up in the porch and you can read it in the bumper Dec/Jan double edition of the Parish Magazine. Snyder describes two kinds of thinking that often get the church into trouble – the thinking that is about 'church business' and the thinking that is about 'Kingdom business.' Sadly, the two are often not the same. They should be, but they're not.

In the 'church' business, Snyder says, people are frequently concerned with church activities, religious behaviour and spiritual things. Church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth – they think about how to get people into church, yet at the same time they also worry about how the world may change the church.

By way of contrast, 'Kingdom' people are concerned with Kingdom activities, all of human behaviour and everything God has made, visible and invisible. They see that all human affairs are saturated with spiritual meaning and Kingdom significance. They seek the Kingdom of God first and

foremost, together with the justice that must come with it. Rather than getting people into church, Kingdom people are concerned about how to get the church into the world, so that we might begin to change it.

Snyder concludes by saying *'If the church has one great need, it is this: To be set free for the Kingdom of God, to be liberated from itself as it has become, in order to be itself as God intends. The church must be freed to participate fully in the economy of God.'* Now that word 'economy' is used here, not in the financial sense of production and consumption that it's become synonymous with, but in the original Greek sense which refers to the careful management of the whole of God's household – including as we heard earlier, all of human behaviour and everything God has made, both visible and invisible.

This is the Kingdom that I believe Our Lord claims – the Kingdom that is not of this world. In our gospel reading, Pilate enjoys the privilege of hearing Jesus speak. We too hear Jesus regularly in the words of scripture, but we may be as far from grasping the point as Pilate was - if we fail to really listen out for the deeper meanings behind everything Jesus utters. Only then can we approach as Priests in the temple of the King of Kings; in humble service to the Servant King; to our great high priest, Christ the King.

Spoken in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

John 18.33-37

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'³⁴ Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'³⁵ Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?'³⁶ Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.'³⁷ Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'

Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14

⁹ As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. ¹⁰ A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened. ¹³ As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. ¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Revelation 1.4b-8

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

⁸ 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.