

Mt. 25.31-46; Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24
Christ the King: Sunday 23rd November 2014.

May the words of my mouth...

Today we celebrate Christ the King and look forward to his coming amongst us. The title 'Christ the King' prompts the question, what kind of king do we celebrate this day? ...a powerful king of great majesty and omnipotence, a servant king, a shepherd king, a gentle Jesus meek and mild, a King of deep humility who lived life to be a sacrifice for many; or a kingly miracle-worker and healer? Perhaps He is a little of all these things.

A group of 6th formers were once asked what they felt the really important questions in life were. Their responses were profoundly religious and produced a set of seven timeless questions: "Who am I? Where am I from? Where am I heading? What's the point? What can I hope for? What do I really want, and is it worth it?" These are the same sort of questions we've been asking ourselves lately about what we want to see as our purpose for this gathering, this church.

It occurred to me that these might have been exactly the same kind of questions that Christ may have asked of himself. Think again from His perspective: Who am I? Where am I from? Where am I heading? What's the point? What can I hope for? What do I really want? Is it worth it? Now some think that Christ knew the answers to all these questions right from the beginning, that from the moment of His birth He had deep insight into His own identity. Some think he only gained this wisdom upon the descent of the

Holy Spirit at his baptism; some that he never knew everything and acted completely out of spontaneous faith and love.

Whatever, Jesus would have been familiar with the words of Ezekiel we heard earlier: "*Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep... I will rescue them... I will bring them out....*" - a prophecy that affirms a saviour able to steadfastly identify Himself with divinity because He was granted, or never lost, the gift of divine prescience and foreknowledge; that all His incarnated life was predestined.

Thinking this way brings a great deal of certainty and security with it – it doesn't negate the physical suffering Jesus had to endure, but it would nonetheless have been the source of tremendous spiritual and psychological strength. For us who would follow Him, it introduces an element of certainty into *our* faith. We can look to this King as the perfect example.

Matthew's Gospel allows us to hear Jesus tell his disciples of what will happen '*When the Son of Man comes in his glory...*' of how when the King comes he '*will say to those at his right hand, "come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"*'. Again, the idea that all has been pre-ordained, even those who have been given the gift of faith. But in all this certainty there is also a pivotal and extremely uncomfortable scene in Matthew that challenges these certainties and is a big part of the reason why I am a Christian. Our Lord will hang from the cross and cry words

taken from Psalm 22: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mt. 27:46).

How can it be that this man, whom we thought had such a special relationship with God, could vent such frustration in such a humiliating way - how could He utter a cry of such dereliction, especially if He knew all along what we suspect He may have known. What kind of a King is this? - I think this is a King who came to us out of loving solidarity, who understands doubt and suffering, who suffers with us in the same way that only a people like Israel, a God-possessed people, can know what it is like to be abandoned by God.

Jesus didn't waste time looking back through rose-coloured spectacles to out-dated ways from the past. He didn't seek sanctuary from the difficult or uncomfortable. He was concerned *for all his people now*; he had to be a realist and look to the future. We should be a God-possessed people too, concerned about the well-being of all the people now, and not a safe, comfortable church that doesn't genuinely, openly, reach out to those beyond its ways or its doors, thinking “O, another church can do that....” or “those committed members who must have time on their hands can do that.”

“*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mt. 27:46). Stanley Hauerwas has said that “This is not a cry of general dereliction; it is the cry of the long-expected Messiah, sacrificed in our stead and thus become the end of sacrifice”. It is the ultimate act of *kenosis*, of complete self-emptying made possible by perfect love. The Father *‘deliberately gives His Christ over to a deadly destiny so that our destiny would*

not be determined by death’. This King enters Jerusalem on a donkey, takes on hostility and loneliness and calls out, in bereavement from Himself, to demonstrate how much he identifies with the human condition. No matter how many times we may consider ourselves unworthy, He obviously thought we were ‘worth it.’

So in conclusion, and through the acceptance of the authority and teaching of Christ the King, I will risk offering some answers to those seven timeless questions posed by the 6th formers:

- **Who am I?** –we are all God’s creation and made in His image (*proviso: that we can each get over our tendency to selfishness!*).
- **Where am I from?** - the imagination of God.
- **Where am I heading?** - the Kingdom of Heaven.
- **What’s the point?** - to seek out opportunities to learn about God’s love and how to pass it on.
- **What can I hope for?** - eternal life and a perpetual, all-pervading relationship with God.
- **What should I really want?** - to share God’s love for us with all of His creation, but especially the rejected and outcast.
- **...and is it all worth it?** - well, I can’t think of anything better than the nurture of love being the reason for life. I hope you agree.

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

Mt. 25.31-46 The Judgement of the Nations

31 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for 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, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in

prison, and did not take care of you?" ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Ephesians 1.15-end Paul's Prayer

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is **the immeasurable greatness of his power** for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has **made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**

Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24 God the True Shepherd

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11 For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.¹² As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land.¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God.¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

20 Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.²¹ Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide,²² I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

23 I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.