



Rev'd Maggie Rode 23/11/14

Christ the King

Ezekiel 34:11-16;20-24,Ephesians 1:15-23,Matthew 23:31-46

Today is a wonderful day in the Liturgical Calendar of the Church. It is an opportunity for a very deliberate focus on Christ and the fact that he is our King. This day was instituted at the beginning of the twentieth century and is always observed on the last Sunday before the beginning of Advent.

However, our Ezekiel reading describes the reign of God without king imagery. God is portrayed as a shepherd. In this reading God's shepherds have not done their job. They have not sought the lost or healed the sick or gathered in the weak sheep. So God, in great compassion and love for humanity for the lost says "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.....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,"

In our Ephesians reading we hear that Christ is "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion"

And our Gospel reading follows on from them both. We hear of Jesus as both shepherd and King. As shepherd he metaphorically separates the sheep from the goats. As the eternal king he rules in glory, humility and generosity, but we are told that there are some real and practical implications for our lives in the way we are and the way we relate to Him as king. The king exercises justice over his subjects, judging them by whether they have loved their neighbours, in feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, welcoming the foreigners, giving clothes to those who need them, caring for the sick , and visiting those in prison.

This is setting out a new type of contract from that in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God surrendered his autonomy by promising to care for his people, provided they obeyed his commandments. In our service later on, we hear our Lord's words "this is my body, given for you" and "this cup is the new covenant in my blood". He offered his very self for us, but on condition that we accept and obey him as king.

William Barclay says of this reading" this is perhaps one of the most vivid parables that Jesus ever spoke, and the lesson is crystal clear – that God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human need." We should respond in obedient service and the shape of that is responding to human need.

To serve the King we must serve others. We must rediscover Jesus' model of servant ministry which is the call to love others. Jesus met both the physical and spiritual needs of the people he

ministered to in the Gospels. As the body of Christ we are his representatives in the world. We must become the feet, hands and voice of the Lord on earth.

In our reading we learn “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.”

There is a wonderful story about a man named Martin of Tours, who was a Roman soldier and also a Christian. One dark winter’s day as he entered a particular city, a beggar stopped him and asked for alms. Martin had no money with him and the beggar was shivering with cold. Martin felt he could not leave him in that state so he took off his soldier’s coat, cut it in two and gave half to the beggar. That night Martin of Tours had a dream. In it he saw heaven with all the angels and Jesus in the midst of them. Jesus was wearing half a Roman soldier’s coat. One of the angels said to him “Master, why are you wearing that battered old coat? Who gave it to you?” And Jesus answered softly “My servant Martin gave it to me”

So, we must be willing to serve others as if we were serving Him.

Life could be much simpler for us and God could do us much good if he would override the stupid mistakes that we make. But of course he won’t because he stands back as he wants us to exercise our free will. God is a king but not a tyrant. If we want to we can reject Jesus up until we die. We are free to refuse to enter the kingdom which is prepared for us. However, the door is kept open until the last minute. William Camden the poet sums it up in the words of a man who was dying as he fell from his horse “betwixt the stirrup and the ground, mercy I ask’d and mercy I found”

If we want to live in the kingdom, then Christ the King is the one who sets the standard. He spent his time with the marginalised, the forgotten and the oppressed. Christ identifies himself with “the least of these” – the ones whom nobody values – when we see them we know we are seeing him too. They are people who need us. People whom we probably won’t be at ease with. People who are very likely to demand of us things that we will find very hard to deliver. We are not commanded to like them, but we are commanded to love them.

So, in our active loving, we are serving Christ. We are offering loving service to the king. “Love one another and love your neighbour as yourself” Real love is always manifested in action. We are not asked to decide who might be sheep and who might be goats. We are asked to love as Christ our king loves and in living lives of love to build the kingdom here on earth. Amen