

The Wymersley Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Sermon 21st November 2021, Christ the King

John 18 v33-37

Today we reach a triumphant end to our journey through the year from last Advent Sunday to this Feast of Christ the King. Through the year we've been hearing the stories about Jesus and his life on earth with its many different settings, and extra-ordinary stories of what Jesus said and taught, how he healed the sick and reached out to those who others refused to love. We have heard stories of temptation and betrayal and witnessed the death of Jesus on the cross. Wilderness times of despair and devastating suffering, but there have also been mountain tops of excitement, the incredible resurrection and ascension of Jesus to his father in heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Pentecost. Not forgetting all the talk of the coming of the Kingdom of God with Christ as King and Judge. From here we can look back and see where we've travelled with Jesus and how all the paths were always leading to this place and time. Now we have a clear vision of Christ as King, before we return to the starting point to begin the journey again next week with the onset of as Advent as we look forward again to the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

For many of us, this year has passed so quickly, despite all our Covid related problems, or perhaps because of them, as we have all been on our own journey through plains of day to day living, through our own valleys of shadow, and up to our own high places of good news, joy and excitement. We've faced times of loss, discouragement, and confusion, the very time we need this vision of Christ the King to give purpose and meaning to our life and the motivation to keep going as we face a new year ahead?

We heard this morning of Daniel's weird and wonderful vision. He sees a figure he calls "Ancient One" or Ancient of Days, a heavenly King, who takes his throne among many thrones. He's surrounded by fire, indeed fire streams from him and he's served by tens of thousands of servants. This is a time of judgment and books are opened which record the sins and good deeds of all who are to be judged, for we will all face judgement one day for the lives we have led. Our images of judgment day are perhaps forbidding and threatening when we see it in terms of a balance of scales weighing up our virtues and our faults. This is not an image that will encourage us when we feel low. But then on the scene appears one "like a human being". Here is someone we can at least identify with – someone who is like us in form. We can even depict this figure which is "like a human being" in a stained- glass window which shows a steam train. So now this figure in human form is brought into our world of everyday life: our world of trains, schools, shops and offices. We can identify with Daniel's human figure who is given an eternal and universal kingship which cannot be overpowered – he will rule over all for ever. So, we have a human figure who is King – but what sort of King is he? One to inspire love, faithfulness and devotion from his followers without force or threat of punishment for desertion?

The Gospel from John tells us that this King is nothing like the kings of this world and his power is not the sort of power this world understands. We hear a lot about people striving for power in our daily news bulletins, whether for good or evil. Terrorists exert power to destroy innocent men and women, nations continue to meet that terrorism with the violence of guns. The richest nations in the world exercise the power of wealth over nations in poverty. Jesus is right, if his kingship belonged in this world his followers would have fought to defend him and to bring down the occupying forces. Our world cries out for a different sort of kingship, a different sort of power and a different way of being together. Jesus the King came not to establish a political sovereignty but to bear witness to the truth of God's reign in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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On our beautiful cross on the wall behind me we have Jesus dressed in a splendid red robe, a kingly figure. But there is no throne for him to sit on, just the cross to which he was nailed. There is a simple crown to cover the crown of thorns that drew blood from his head, but no gold ring of power for his finger just the nails which were hammered through his hands and feet. The cross of Christ the King is a reminder that the victory of love over death was won after much suffering but it is also a reminder that his love did bring victory over death. Jesus the Son of Man, carries the marks suffering, but he is also Christ the King who gives us our freedom. He treats us as equals and friends, however, there is still some measure of power that we should ascribe to Jesus - a power over our lives. A power - not of coercion but of respect, and love that has as its fruit, willing obedience to God in all areas of our lives.

Jesus commands us as his followers to build his kingdom where we are, so please continually pray for new people to come to worship at the churches of our Benefice. As we approach Christmas there are many different services to invite people to, but don't just invite them, take them by the hand and bring them along so they too can know that God's love, acceptance and healing is already among us!

Christ the King- Jesus, still walks with us and reaches out to us with hands which bear the marks of suffering. Christ the King has been with us throughout our journey this year and he will go with us on our journey through next year and for all our lives.

So as we celebrate the eternal presence of Christ the King in bread and wine let us pray that his spirit will bring us refreshment, peace and sustenance for the journey that lies ahead.

Amen.

Reverend Irene