

Christ the King

25 11 12

Eternal Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven
that he might rule over all things as Lord and King:
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
and in the bond of peace,
and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet.

Our text is from today's gospel according to St John chapter 18 and verse 33:

'Are you the king of the Jews?'

If November is indeed the month for remembering then before we start the Christian Year again next week on Advent Sunday then what we should be remembering today is the fact that Christ is king - not least given the fact that this Sunday is dedicated to Christ the King.

Now if you are a republican and a Christian, it must be a little odd to think of Christ as King. Clearly, Christ is king in a very different sense of the word that might be used to describe our own reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth II. So this morning, I'd like to consider briefly what Jesus says of his kingship when asked the question at his trial on Good Friday by Pontius Pilate which is our text today:

'Are you the king of the Jews?'

You will be aware that the Sanhedrin meeting unprecedentedly at night had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy. But the charge the Jewish leaders level against him when they haul him up before Pilate is one of insurrection: that Jesus is claiming to be the king of the Jews and by definition anyone so doing must be stirring up a Jewish revolt against Caesar and Rome. Sadly anyone looking less like a king than Jesus did at that moment could hardly be imagined so Pilate poses the question 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

Jesus answers the question with a question: 'Do you ask this on your own or did others tell you about me?' It sounds an odd question to ask. What I think Jesus wants to know is whether Pilate is asking a personal question, a question to which he personally wants an answer or is he simply asking a routine question any judge would pose to a man on trial before him.

Pilate's reply is tetchy and cross and his irritation is clear to hear: 'I am not a Jew am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done ?' Pilate stands on his dignity as a Roman citizen. What he believes or not is not shaped by any sympathy for a Jewish religious view of the world. Truthfully and rather sharply, Pilate tells Jesus he has been handed over to him by his own people. So Pilate wants to know from Jesus what he is supposed to have done.

So Jesus tells him the truth about himself: '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.'

Jesus is trying to tell Pilate the truth about the real nature of his authority – his power and his identity is not rooted in this world as Pilate’s clearly is. Three times he tells Pilate it is not from this world. Jesus is trying to suggest that there is an otherworldliness to his kingdom. Jesus is implying that his is a kingdom of God not of Man.

So Pilate thinks he has understood and simply asks again, ‘So you are a king?’ His question is really a statement. Pilate thinks that Jesus must be a king if he has says he has a kingdom

But of course I’m not sure Pilate has really understood what it means for Jesus to be king so Jesus tries one last time to communicate the truth about himself: ‘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.’ Here we have it: Jesus, like the prophets of old, speaks the word of God. What he has to say is the truth. Indeed, earlier in the same gospel, Jesus says of himself, ‘I am the way the truth and the life.’ (14 v6) Jesus is the Word of God speaking the word of God to the people of God. But whether we or they are listening is another matter.

So in what sense is Jesus the King of the Jews? One short sermon is too short a space to answer fully and adequately such a rich question. But from the passage today, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God which paradoxically is not ‘from’ or ‘of’ this world though it is clearly **in** this world. His is a kingdom whose authority is rooted in the truth. He is a king who stands for what is true. His subjects are

those who recognise the truth of what he is saying – that he is the Son of God, his Messiah, the Christ, de facto King of the Jews – and they act accordingly. Pilate will ask the question ‘**What is truth ?**’ but sadly he fails to act upon it.

But what about us ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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H: Sermon 26 : Christ the king

