

Sermon 20-11-2022

Living in the Kingdom

If you were born before 1925 you would not have heard of the feast of Christ the King, because in that year Pope Pius XI invented that feast, and Catholic or Protestant or Reformed we have taken it up. So on the Sunday before the beginning of Advent we annually celebrate Christ as King. At other times we might celebrate Christ as shepherd, or healer, or bringer of peace, or bringer of salvation – and we think of Christ as all of these. Indeed as we celebrate Jesus as Christ, Messiah, redeemer, sacrificial lamb – there seems no end to the titles and labels. We follow a multi-faceted Jesus. So many names and labels. We almost trip over them. No wonder that the Church encourages us to consider them one at a time in an orderly fashion.

Discussion questions:

- How often do think of Jesus in terms of a King?
- What is it about him that is "kingly"? In the case of our own King (Charles III, that is) we tend to admire him when he displays un-kingly characteristics – when he behaves like an “ordinary” bloke. At other time we don't like that).
- Does Jesus' kingly nature reinforce the other images we have of him, or do the various images of him contradict each other?
- Are there any aspects of human kingship that we don't (or would rather not) ascribe to Jesus? If so, how would we pick and choose various characteristics we would like Jesus to display.
- Could our own (new) King ever be expected to be like Christ, the King?
- Do we ever think of Jesus and as an earth-style King? Does that help, or make things worse?

And while we are talking about Christ as King surely we must also talk about his Kingdom. What is that like? The Kingdom of God is said to be here already. We are in it and we are of it. So - we don't have to wait for it to come. It's here - now! We can be pleased about that. But so what? What difference does it make? Will it make life easier? Will it confer certain privileges on me -and you? Can I get a passport that will enable me to move to other kingdoms? Where is the King? Does he have a palace? Does he have a gold coach? Does he declare war? Does he have real power - or is he just a figurehead?

But how do we recognise the Kingdom when we see it? Can we mistake other people's kingdoms with Jesus' Kingdom? How can we be sure that we are in it, and not on the outside?

How will we recognise the presence of The Kingdom?

How will we recognise the presence of The Kingdom?
When sorrow is redeemed by joy.

How will we recognise the presence of The Kingdom?
When darkest thoughts are banished by the light.

How will we recognise the presence of The Kingdom?
When error is exposed by truth.

How will we recognise the presence of The Kingdom?
When war is not a first resort.

How will we recognise the presence of The Kingdom?

- When insight takes its place alongside reason;
- when the toolbox of my life contains unconditional love;
- when silence punctuates the language of my faith;
- when all the world is seen within a raindrop;
- when power permits persuasion;
- when minus is converted into plus;
- when anxiousness is overcome by patience;
- when trust in the future demands no reason;
- when the economy of life is measured in degrees of fellowship;
- when hope replaces despair;
- and we know all things as they simply are.

Then, and only then,
will I begin to recognise the presence of The Kingdom

I think Paul would tell us that we will recognise the Kingdom by the presence of extravagant love. In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13 you will remember him saying:

2 If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. 3-7 If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

And remember this, that the love about which Paul speaks only makes sense in the alternative Kingdom that Jesus advocates, and in which we are privileged to be citizens:

- *Love never gives up.*
- *Love cares more for others than for self.*
- *Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.*
- *Love doesn't strut,*
- *Doesn't have a swelled head,*
- *Doesn't force itself on others,*
- *Isn't always "me first,"*
- *Doesn't fly off the handle,*
- *Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,*
- *Doesn't revel when others grovel,*
- *Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,*
- *Puts up with anything,*
- *Trusts God always,*
- *Always looks for the best,*
- *Never looks back,*
- *But keeps going to the end.*
- *8-10 Love never dies.*

The Kingdom of God. The rule of love.

May it be so.