

Preb Samantha Stayte

Christ the King (Year A)

Cockington

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 Ephesians 1:15-end Matthew 25:31-end

In speaking and listening may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

We have come to the last Sunday of the church year with this great celebration of “Christ the King”. This is the feast that reminds in the words of Ephesians, that God has put all things under Jesus’ feet and made him head over all things. This the great assurance of our faith in a world that can seem uncertain and discordant: that Jesus Christ is the one who has overcome all that is not of God, and in whose life death and resurrection we can see the triumph of God.

If this is true, it is really important that we look at Jesus to see what that triumph really looks like.

We have lots of images of power and dominance around us in the world. At the moment we see a lot of different groups and people fighting to come out on top – to be the most powerful – to win power, inherit power, keep others in their place with power.

While all this influences us it is really important that we keep our eyes on Jesus to see what the triumph of God really looks like, that we let Christ his kingship and show us what his rule is like, rather than our usual view of what rulers are like getting in the way.

Today we are blessed in this quest to keep our eyes on Christ our King because we are celebrating a baptism – two young men and their supporters in faith will remind us of our own baptismal commitment to Jesus as our Lord, our leader and our King. If you have been baptised I encourage you, as you listen to the vows made to pray for God’s help, God’s grace to live according to those same promises on which your own baptism was founded. If you have not been baptised, perhaps hearing these profound promises may help you think about what is really important in the way that you live.

The vows are a commitment to turn away from all that is not of God and to turn to Christ, to make Christ our King, letting him guide and rule all the things we think and say and do.

In our gospel today Jesus gives us a picture of the time when he will come as the King of all things, and what he will reward as the behaviour of those who have truly followed him. It is a picture to help us see the world as it is now in a new

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way, to give a big clue to how to serve our King and where we might find him in this world now. It is a story to help us know what we need to be doing now if we want to hear the beautiful words of the King to those who have been good subjects, those who have lived their baptism promises to the full:

“Come you that are blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”

What do we need to be doing: feeding those who are hungry, helping those who are thirsty find refreshment, welcoming those who are strangers, clothing those who have nothing to wear, taking care of those who are sick, and befriending those who are in prison

Those who love the King, those who love Christ will be those whose habit and joy it is to help those in the world who need help, to love those who suffer, to serve the powerless.

And the great mystery at the heart of this story which we will need to grow into understanding – a lifetime’s task – is that this service of the powerless is not just obeying the orders of the King we love, it is actually the direct service of him.

“I was hungry and you gave me food” he says “when you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”

The Kingdom of God is a place where the vulnerable are restored because they are at the centre: the hungry are fed, the thirsty can drink, strangers are no more because all are welcomed, healing kindness comforts those who suffer and the bonds of prison are released by friendship.

Jesus leads us into this kingdom not by force, but by identifying fully with those most at risk, showing us the way to love each other fully in not just word by in deed.

He is calling us to recognise the triumph of God is unconditional love.

This is the Kingdom prepared for us from the beginning of the world, that in baptism we step into and in our lives as disciples of Jesus we learn to share in. A Kingdom that is not of this world but that by grace we can be the signs of in this world.

As I said, this is a mystery it will take a lifetime to live into and we may not fully understand it this side of heaven, but the steps on our way are simple if we want to serve Christ our King.

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The first step is to ask Jesus to help us become more like him – and that is just what is going to happen when those who are being baptised and their supporters make these promises and then they are baptised in to the way Christ leads.

We too can ask for God's grace, God's gift to make us more Christ-like.

The next step is to build the habits of generosity and compassion for all our brothers and sisters in the world, remembering that we are all children of God, all loved uniquely by God. When we see someone who needs something we can give, can we become those who show the love that God has for them in our actions? Can we pray that our love, God's love, overcomes any fear we have of reaching out in care and connection? As we practice small acts of kindness, bigger acts get easier, more normal. We become more willing to receive kindness too, more able to show our own weaknesses, our own need for compassion, the ways we too are sometimes the "least of these", the place where others can find and serve Christ our King.

As we begin the last week of this church year, what can you do in the coming days to put God's love into action, to meet someone's need that is in your gift? To end this year with the triumph of love?

Gracious God,

As we end this year, in the power of our baptism, by your grace make of us faithful servants of Christ the king, so that all we do tells the story of your love.
Amen