

CHRIST THE KING
24/11/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

In our circle of uncertainty and hurry,

you, O God, are the fixed point of calm.

In our stretched moments of stress and emotion,

you, O God, are the secure centre of peace.

In our well-worn routine of the everyday,

you, O God, are the flash of fresh inspiration.

In our moments of the ordinary and the earthly,

you, O God, are the Spirit that transforms and transcends with the Holy.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, enable us to prepare for the reign of Christ.

When the reign of Christ begins, all will be free to worship and to express their opinions.

When the reign of Christ begins,

weapons of war will be destroyed and all children will be secure.

When the reign of Christ begins,

Mother Earth will be respected and her waters will be pure.

When the reign of Christ begins,

prayer and praise will flow spontaneously to God and worship will be wholehearted and joyful.

But when will the reign of Christ begin?

We will bring it closer! Amen.

HYMN 228 Crown Him with many crowns

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiJYgC_6AFc

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

O God, we praise and adore you. You are truly without beginning or ending

- your reign is eternal and your being all-powerful, and yet you chose to

reveal your power in the most powerless and vulnerable manner - as a

baby. As you shared our humanity in Jesus, you gave the world a new

understanding of power. We know now that power is not to be used to

dominate, but to serve others as Christ did. He transformed the love of

power by the power of love. We gather today to celebrate your rule of love in our hearts as we experience it in Jesus and through the enabling gift of your Spirit. We offer this prayer of gratitude for these blessings in the name of Jesus, our Servant King.

Jesus, servant king, we confess our failure to grasp that your reign is found whenever domination is overcome, whenever justice is experienced, and whenever people are released from prejudice and exploitation.

Forgive us any involvement in the pursuit of power which exploits or demeans others.

We confess our lack of commitment in seeking to transform systems which leave people powerless. Too often we prefer to leave the difficult tasks to others so that we can get on with our own safe agendas.

Forgive us when we forget that doing your will is our greatest priority.

Remind us, O God, that the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to witness to the values of your kingdom in and through all we do and say, and that thankfully this power far exceeds any apathy or fear on our part .

Renew us with your Spirit, O God, so that our lives testify to the truth of your kingdom revealed so fully in Jesus, servant king, in whose name we pray. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

The good news is this: our sins are forgiven through “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sinsto him be glory and dominion forever and ever.” Rev 1:5,6

Hallelujah! Amen!

READINGS

- **Revelation 1:4b–8**

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed[a] us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him,
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.
So it is to be. Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

- **John 18:33–37**

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to 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.” ³⁷ Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “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.”

ITEM Neville

HYMN 207 Jesus shall reign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcHXOnKZ3ME>

SERMON

As it is the last Sunday of the Lectionary year we look at the image of Christ as King. For me this Sunday’s emphasis is more about exploring our images of Christ. Christ is more than a political or titular head of some organisation. I hope that today we can take time to tie together some of the images of Christ that we have explored in our readings during the past year.

Historically the naming of ‘Christ the King Sunday’ goes back to a political anomaly. In 1922 Pope Pius XI decreed this title for the last day of the lectionary year because he was negotiating with Mussolini to sure up the independence of the Vatican. In this deal the Vatican agreed to suppress the only democratic party in Italy. Pius had little time for democracy. His preference was to deal only with monarchies and other authoritarian regimes so that he could have treaties which favoured the Roman church.

It is worth remembering that both Mussolini and Hitler granted favours to the mainline churches which followed their dictatorial rules and that Pope Pius did not criticise the dangerous personal attacks on the citizens of those countries.

We can now see that we have an anomaly in historical terms, so why is it still part of the Christian calendar? The ironic absurdity is that it allows us to explore the way we look at Christ in terms that are not clearly part of the passages traditionally associated with the lectionary.

In today's passage from John's Gospel we are taken to part of the trial of Christ after he was dragged there by the Temple Priests. Let me repeat it: "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."

I think that it is worthwhile reflecting here about when we pray using words 'Your Kingdom come,' and again at the end of the Lord's Prayer when we say: "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever."

Let me be clear here that while we are not entering into a political debate in any way, we are equally acknowledging that when we use the words: 'Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,' we are clearly acknowledging that things here on earth are far from perfect. Just think back to the last week or so as the news of political upheavals, climate change through stopping pollution and wars have been debated cross the globe. A lot has been said by politicians but I doubt that many concrete solutions have been finalised.

Discussions on things like global warming are in many ways political as the solutions are not the simple preserve of a few well-meaning people. What we need to be reflecting on is that no matter what the approach is of any regime we are in fact seeking to get those systems to move aside to allow God to rule in grace and harmony.

Under the controlling power of Rome at that time it was a standard principle that no one could profess to follow any movement where they looked to any deity or power greater than the Roman Emperor. Those who crossed this line were promptly stomped out. Treaties with subject states all

acknowledged Rome's dominance. Hence the question from Pilate on that fateful night was loaded with trouble. If Jesus had claimed an earthly kingdom he would immediately have been treated as an enemy of the state. However the conversation soon moves to a discussion on what is true authority and true kingship. As we can see Jesus avoided this trap!

Pilate starts with: 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

Jesus responds to this by changing the emphasis and says: 'Do you ask this on your own, or has someone tried to influence your thoughts?' This is a real challenge to Pilate to suggest that he would be unable to figure the situation out for himself. Jesus is suggesting that Pilate is no more than a pawn in the hands of someone else in Rome and the Temple priests.

Pilate responds pointing out that he is not Jew and has his own sources of information. He then asks Jesus what He has done to so offend the temple priests so that they have handed Jesus over to him. Here John's Gospel utilises one of his 'loaded' phrases, "the Jews." John shares that this term refers to those who fiercely held on to the existing religious and political systems at that time, ignoring the teachings of Jesus. This meant that they were also resistant to where God was calling them. Claims of love and grace challenged their own selfish agendas.

When Pilate said: "I am not a Jew, am I?" This question is left hanging as a statement in itself. It says to John's audience that his allegiance to Rome did not necessarily make him resistant to God. Here is where Jesus words come into focus. "My kingship is not from this world," replies Jesus. "If it were, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingship is not from here."

It is not as if Rome was opposed to people who were recognised as kings, after all Herod was a king but he was compliant to Roman domination and rule. For Pilate the only issue was whether Jesus was of any kind of a threat to Rome. In this situation the answers might have appeared evasive but they were going in different directions.

Jesus is trying to say: "It is you that is trying to put the 'king' label on me. My job is to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And with that statement, the gauntlet is thrown down to Rome, fair and square. 'Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice, not yours, not Rome, not Macquarie Street, not Canberra, not the Pentagon.'

While we might think that Jesus is rejecting the word 'king' he is at the same time asserting His Sovereign status. This then raises a metaphor. That is where we consciously use one word to bring out a hidden truth. We probably can agree that 'king' is not the correct word for Jesus as in reading the Gospels we see that he constantly left the scene whenever the crowds stated to contemplate the idea of making Him a king.

Jesus is not interested with all the trappings of being a monarch. He has no need of vast and lavish palaces and an attending staff of servants and courtiers. For Him there is no need for human laws or even a military force. The political idea of a 'king' does not give us any insight into understanding Jesus.

When we say the 'Jesus is King' we are seeking to explore a far more profound truth. There is in fact no earthly king or queen like Jesus. They are earthbound human terms. We are not the submissive subjects of some domineering set of subjugating laws. What we are seeking to understand is that Jesus' message is the agenda that we need to seek out and follow.

We are not part of any attempt to undermine the political system of any other country, let alone our own nation. Equally we are not willing to compromise the values of love and justice and gracious hospitality just to comply with their political agendas. Our allegiance is only on the King of Love who is not caught up in human nationalism and boundaries.

Despite popular thinking that the advent of more democratic political systems which replaced the old monarchies we have not really resolved the age old problem of the tension between human politics and God's Kingdom.

Democracies can be just as blood thirsty at expanding their boundaries and subjugating parts of God's creation. They may think that by broadening their power base that they are doing a better job but they can be just as aggressive in dominating and subjugating others.

We have an allegiance to the 'Word of Love' in Jesus. Jesus went to the cross so that He would not sell out to the demands of earthly powers. In doing so He liberated us. Jesus accepted humiliation and the cross as there is no compromise with earthly based power and domination. He is the

suffering servant who continues to expose the lies of the abusive regimes of the world, including many who we might think are acceptable.

We are members of a special community which has no barriers based on race or nationality or gender, let alone wealth or social standing. We do know that we are called to be careful stewards of the wonderful natural resources that God provided for us. We need to be able to resist the outlandish claims of the powermongers in this world. God has the only legitimate power.

Looking back at the prayers we had earlier we can pick up on some ideas of how we can see Christ:

- Without beginning or end.
- Revealing His power in a powerless and vulnerable way.
- Does not choose to dominate.
- Servant leader.
- Shows the power of love.
- Forever just.
- Endless grace.

Christ is a King in that He came to show us what God has done for us and to bring us the grace to be part of the one true community, Christians. This monarchy does not require an army or endless laws. We are able to live with the knowledge that God loves and care for all of us, no matter what!

HYMN 315 Mine eyes have seen the glory

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc4w_UEpCQ

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of truth,

We are people of faith

because you give us the gift of faith.

May all that we have and all that we are
be dedicated to faithful and truthful living.

May this money that came to us as a gift from you
be used as a gifts in your service.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of all clarity and truth-telling.
we read that Pilate called Jesus a king
and that Jesus said that he was a king,
but Jesus and Pilate had very different understandings
about what being a king meant.
We know that Pilate's kingdom
was all about domination and control
and that Jesus's kingdom is all about freedom and care.
Today, we pray for all who live in kingdoms
where their lives are controlled and threatened.
We pray for all who are trapped in regimes of violence.
We pray for a different world, a different kingdom,
where freedom and justice rule,
where love and mercy are the currency.
We pray for the kingdom of God
to break into the world and into every life.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 147 To God be the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

BENEDICTION

Grace to you and peace from God,
who is, who was, and who is to come.
Go gently into this day.

Go softly into this night.
Go into the great world of God in joy.
Grace to you and peace from God,
who is, who was, and who is to come.
Go in the name of God.
Go in the way of Christ.
Go in the power of the Spirit.
Grace to you and peace from God,
who is, who was, and who is to come.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74