

Feast of the Reign of Christ St. Luke's 25th November 2018

Readings: Daniel 7:1-18
 Revelation 1:4-8
 John 18:33-37

Reflection

*'Our king is calling from the hungry furrows
 Whilst we are cruising through the aisles of plenty,
 Our hoardings screen us from the man of sorrows,
 Our soundtracks drown his murmur: 'I am thirsty'.
 He stands in line to sign in as a stranger
 And seek a welcome from the world he made,
 We see him only as a threat, a danger,
 He asks for clothes, we strip-search him instead.
 And if he should fall sick then we take care
 That he does not infect our private health,
 We lock him in the prisons of our fear
 Lest he unlock the prison of our wealth.
 But still on Sunday we shall stand and sing
 The praises of our hidden Lord and King.'*ⁱ

What does it mean to be kingdom people, people who belong to the truth, people who listen to the voice of Jesus?

I humbly invite you to share something of my Saturday and my learnings from it:

As I opened the Addington fair yesterday morning, in a small wooden church (built in 1876) in a Church Square encircled with towering guardian trees of similar age, cloaked by somewhat threatening grey skies, I prayed the following:

'Most loving and gracious God, whatever the weather this day, may your Son shine amongst and within us.....'

What I experienced over the ensuing six hours (yes, it was a long day!) was a glimpse of kingdom living – a little church turned upside-down inside, with altar, pews and lectern set carefully aside, the sanctuary now an entertainment space (yet with Mary the Virgin watching from her banner), tiny kitchen a-bustle, café tables set for hospitality, and trestles groaning under the weight of preloved goods! A fair that represented and combined local community and church – the neighbourhood association with a ‘have your say’ table for locals to share their perspectives on important issues, a community garden stall, ethnic foods, entertainment from community and school choirs, fairies and a wizard blowing giant bubbles with local children amongst the trees, old fashioned sack- and egg and spoon races and subsidised pony rides made affordable for all, bargains galore and not a single-use plastic bag in sight!

Although the sun of our solar system didn’t break through the clouds yesterday, the Son who warms human hearts most certainly broke through in Church Square. To be honest, I hadn’t been looking forward to the fair, but the reigning Christ warmed my heart and I headed home physically weary yet somehow lighter (and not only in wallet!). The Addington parish makes no profit from the fair – it’s purpose – unlike many fairs and markets – is not to fundraise, but to subsidise next year’s event so that no-one is excluded, and everyone will find a kindly and generous welcome. I was deeply humbled as I experienced something more of Christ’s realm and the way of love in Addington yesterday.

Our gospel reading from John contrasts the way of Jesus and the way of Caesar, embodied in the actions of Pontius Pilate. Christ’s realm is not grounded in this world’s values of imperialism, coercion, violence, and oppression. It takes the pathway of loving hospitality. Every knee bows out of love rather than fear. Christ creates a circle of love that embraces everyone, seekers, doubters, skeptics, pilgrims, and persons of other faiths. As we read John 18 we may be reminded of the Pauline affirmation from Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

As we celebrate the Feast of the Reign of Christ, we are reminded that we are a kingdom not *from* here, but *for* here – as Jesus has taught us to pray: ‘*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven*’. Commentator Steve Godfrey writes: ‘*Oh, to be a church that can speak to this culture rather than just mimicking it in some sad parody. We belong to the truth and we listen to Jesus’ voice. Jesus is speaking to us. He’s speaking to us about our identity. He’s speaking to us about our calling. We are representatives of the kingdom of heaven called to redeem the world to its Creator.*’ⁱⁱⁱ

Working for God’s kingdom can feel futile. It’s unfeasible, even ridiculous to think that our efforts and energies can turn a world around into the world God sees it can be. But as the Richard Branson quote states: “*Changing the world begins with a small group of people who simply refuse to accept the unacceptable*”. Are we – as Christ’s Church - such a group?

It’s no easy task, especially as we seem to be influenced by other culture’s traditions like Black Friday shopping sprees – does it not seem strange that the day after Thanksgiving, when thanks are expressed for all the goodness in life, that a day of rampant consumerism follows, engaging the desire for *more* in an attempt to satisfy human wants rather than deeper needs. But I certainly take *some* heart as I hear the ‘single-use plastic bag’ ban announced, even *as* our oceans accumulate rubbish and harm other creatures; and as I read of foreign fishing crews finally getting their unpaid wages – an issue that actively engaged our own diocesan social justice advocate, the Revd. Jolyon White.

“*Changing the world begins with a small group of people who simply refuse to accept the unacceptable*”.

Jesus’ kingdom is a state of being, a way to live, a commitment to a particular way to view the world. And in John’s gospel, Jesus wants us to see that his kingdom is only about *place*, if place indicates the profound and intimate “place” of relationship with God. Jesus’ kingdom is not about amassing additional amounts of control. Jesus’ kingdom is not about his ultimate rule over and above others. Jesus’ kingdom is about relationship. “*My kingdom is not from this world*” because it is from God. The concept of kingdom is radically recalculated in the Gospel of John, from kingdoms that strain

and sever relationships to a kingdom that puts relationship at its core. When kingdom is construed from the truth of relationship and not rule, from the truth of incarnation and not location, from the truth of love and not law, then Jesus as truth rings true.

In our own communities and lives, it is easy to set up our own little kingdoms – even when we’re doing good, or working for justice. It is easy to get caught up in purely human agendas and priorities. So, as we seek to live out our faith in compassion and justice, we need also to embody the priorities of Jesus - to relinquish the need to get our way all the time. It will mean refusing to co-operate with any systems or courses of action that oppress or reject some people. It means committing to the serving and sacrificial nature of God’s Reign within our families, churches and neighbourhoods. And it means keeping Christ as both the object of our worship (as opposed to our own desires, agendas or needs) and the model on which we base our lives. It is only when we are willing to commit daily to these values that we can truly claim to be worshipping Christ as King.

One month from today, after an Advent season of preparation and anticipation, we will once again welcome the truth of Jesus our incarnate king. We will once again fall on our knees and hear the angel voices of that Holy Night. As we approach the end of another Church year, may we glimpse a foretaste of that truth.....

‘Led by the light of faith serenely beaming, With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.....

...The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger; In all our trials born to be our friend.

Heknows our need, to our weakness, no stranger,

Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!

Behold your King! Our King, before him bend! ⁱⁱⁱ

Helen Roud

ⁱ Malcolm Guite, *The Feast of Christ the King*, p.62, Sounding the Seasons, Canterbury Press, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Steve Godfrey, *Church in the World*, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ From Christmas Carol *O Holy Night*, Placide Cappeau