

KING OF KINGS

NOVEMBER 25, 2007

St. Luke's Gospel chronicles: And when they came to the place which is called the place of the skull there they crucified him, and the criminals one on the right and one on the left. There was an inscription over him "This is the King of the Jews".

This morning as we gather together in worship and celebration, we join with Christians of all denominations throughout the world as we celebrate this last Sunday of the church's year.

This day completes the Christian journey through the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth and in Heaven which began on Advent Sunday 2006 and will begin again next Sunday as we prepare once again for his birth in Advent. This last Sunday before Advent has been traditionally known as Christ the King Sunday.

We began the church year with Advent, the beginning of our journey to the stable to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We set our mind to the times before Jesus was born, to get a feel for the Jews who had prayed for so many centuries that the Messiah might be born in their midst. Every day of a devout Jew's life would include the prayer that God might come into their midst and bring about the New Jerusalem, that day when God's reign would be manifest on earth and known to all humankind.

Our celebrations in Prince Edward North included our pageant which reenacted the birth events of Jesus and his parents Joseph and Mary. We sang carols, celebrated a congregational Christmas Dinner and came together in the quiet of Christmas Eve to wait for the birth of the Messiah.

When Christmas was officially over on January 6th, we continued our weekly services of praise and celebrations of thanks. Ash Wednesday reminded us of the coming of the Easter events when men and women moved from adulation of Jesus to anger and disappointment. They heard themselves tell Pontius Pilate to crucify Jesus, this man who they felt was not the Messiah after all. With the disciples, we watched events unfold which seemingly ended with the death of Jesus on the Cross and the laying of his body in a borrowed tomb.

Suddenly, sorrow turned to celebration as we experienced with Mary Magdalene and the disciples the empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus. Once again, our Lord reigned supreme!

This Sunday, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday which ends another church year's cycle.

There is ignorance in a high percentage of the population of the essentials facts of Lord's life, his teachings, let alone facts about his death and resurrection. As Christians we name Jesus, here in our worship together, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We hold that Jesus was the one anointed by God to be Messiah, the King of the Jews.

This week on the TV show Jeopardy, the question was asked: name the fisherman to whom Jesus entrusted the Keys of his Kingdom. Of course all of you would say Peter. However, the contestant answered Jonah.

We live in a society where basic knowledge of the life and death and teachings of Jesus is unknown to many. No longer can we take it for granted that people have knowledge of even the Ten Commandments. After all, it has been a long time since the movie of the same name.

So, here we are in church speaking about the Feast of Christ the King. What on earth does this mean?

We observe a tradition that is 2,000 years old, one that dates from the time the three magi or wise men bent their knees in homage to the babe of Bethlehem called Jesus.

Years later, Pontius Pilate clearly wondered who was this so called King of the Jews. Pilate, who served the most powerful Emperor in the world, knew what a King was, the authority and absolute power he wielded.

For Pilate, the word “kingdom” had a purely temporal or earthly reference.

The very idea that the bruised and beleaguered man that stood before him could be taken as a King must have seemed ridiculous. Yet Pilate did his duty; he asks Jesus if the charge against him was true.

Jesus answers Pilate that he is a king – but that his kingdom is not of this world. “If my kingdom was of this world my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities”.

The kingdom Jesus speaks about is not of this world, not an earthly kingdom. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is a spiritual kingdom where he reigns by truth and love over the hearts and lives of men and women,

Jesus Christ our Lord exercised his power by serving others, by forgiving others, by healing others, by sacrificing himself for others. His power is the power of truth, the power of faith, the power of hope, the power of love... the power of life itself.

Jesus calls us today to obedience, to faith and to love here and now. But Jesus does not force us or compel us. He calls us to allow God to enter into our lives and rule our lives; he invites us to walk by the light he himself has shed.

And he shows us in his own person and in the lives of those who follow him that when we turn to him, there is healing and wholeness to be found

You have no doubt noted that the cross we have in our church is an empty cross. Our Roman Catholic brethren usually have the crucifix which has Christ on the cross. Ours

represents the risen, conquering alive Lord we serve. The crucifix concentrates on the great agony and sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of men and women. Both are great statements of truth for we need to remember both the agony and the ecstasy of the Easter events.

When I was the minister of Gilmore Park United Church in Richmond, the suburb of Vancouver which housed the International Airport, my neighbouring Roman Catholic Church was staffed by the Atonement Fathers of New York, a former Anglican order which came into the Catholic Church in the time of Cardinal Newman. It was a new church, less than five years old, the attendance at which was some 1500 a Sunday at four masses. When it was designed, simplicity was the key factor with few adornments. However, above the altar was a huge and impressive Cross which hung from the ceiling. On it was depicted not the crucified body of Christ but the very much alive Christ the King. He was fully clothed with his back against the cross arms outstretched in welcome. He wore a crown, not a crown of thorns and the radiance of his smile overwhelmed the worshiper.

This Christ the King overshadowed all else in the sanctuary and set the tone of celebration and victory. I never tired of seeing it nor did I ever fail to feel the power of its presence. Christ's presence should overwhelm, comfort and challenge us in all we do both in and outside the worshiping community.

So we have the various crosses depicting Jesus. The Empty Cross, emphasizing the Resurrection, Jesus promising eternal life to those who believe in God.

The crucifix, Jesus hanging on the Cross offering himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the World.

The other cross is the Christ the King. On the cross, no longer with a crown of thorns on His head but adorned with a crown and dressed in the robes of a priest, arms outstretched, no longer nailed to the cross but reigning from the cross. Remember the words Jesus spoke: "And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself".

My brothers and sisters in the faith, we are those who have been baptized and confirmed and already made a commitment to Jesus Christ as the Lord of life.

We have placed ourselves under the Reign of Christ. We know who is in charge when it is dark and the world is falling apart, about who we can turn to when we are in need or when others are in need about who we should go to when we seek justice for others and when we look for mercy ourselves.

Jesus is in charge if we allow him to be, not with force but with love and life. He it is who has control over darkness who proclaimed "I am the Light of the world, he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life". It is Jesus Christ who vanquishes death and brings healing and peace to all who follow him.

It is our calling as believers to implement the Reign of Christ, this sovereignty of Love. Our collective prayer for this Sunday should be that God will restore all things in Jesus Christ and that the whole world may be freed and brought together under his gentle and loving rule.

It means that you and I as his followers are called to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, to visit the sick and seek justice for all that are oppressed.

Yes the Kingdom of God is justice and joy,
The Kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The Kingdom of God is challenge and choice.

Thanks be to God for his gift to us of Christ the King. Alleluia.

Rev. Gary Magarrell