

Sermon 'Christ the King' 22nd November 2020

Matthew 25: 40

'The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

The Christian Year fall into two halves. The first half runs from Advent to Trinity Sunday, and we recall and celebrate the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. This half year ends with Pentecost, when we commemorate the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Trinity when we recall that we experience God: not only as Father the creator of the world; but also as Son, who shared the particularity of being human like us in every way apart from our sinfulness; and Holy Spirit inspiring our actions in the world. The Greek words used to describe the Holy Spirit mean: comforter; advocate; strengthener and helper. It is a word of military origin and implies one who encourages even 'prods' a person into action. If not coercion it is certainly implies strong encouragement.

But what happens in the *Trinity Season* - roughly half the year - which draws to its close today in the *Feast of Christ the King*? Today we use either the red or white liturgical colours, representing respectively Christ's death and resurrection, but the Trinity Season is mostly marked by the green liturgical colour signifying 'God's Good Earth'. It is sometimes called the 'ferial' season meaning ordinary only in the sense that it does not include the major festivals that commemorate Advent, Christmas, Passiontide and Easter. It is not 'ordinary' because during the Trinity season we are concentrating on what Jesus taught and how we should behave: in short on the Kingdom of God. Today is a time to take stock and summarise the main themes that have been developed in sermons during the Trinity Season.

First, Jesus taught that his life represented the coming of the Kingdom of God, also called the Kingdom of Heaven by St. Matthew, and that this comprises two perspectives: a future dimension beyond death when God's love will support us even after we die and his rule will begin. It is our 'sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life'. But Jesus also taught us how we can build aspects of the kingdom in the here and now. And what will this kingdom be like? Well it will not be like the world as we know it. This is the 'old earth': of inequality; racism; divisions between nations; warfare; hunger and suffering. It is the world of the empty bowl for many and over-consumption, greed and gluttony for the few.

Jesus asks us, assisted by the Holy Spirit, to build aspects of this kingdom today: here in West Kirby and Caldy. Jesus could only live in one place and at one time, Palestine in the first century AD, but the message of Ascension Day and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is that this mission is now universal. God loves and cares for all not just the people of Palestine 2000 years ago. We are now Christ's agents in the world. We are his hands and his eyes.

Let us focus briefly on a number of Biblical passages that summarise sermons and 'Thoughts for the Week' over the past six months and which highlight some of the themes that have emerged during this Trinity Season.

First, The Kingdom of God has both a present and a future dimension

'Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away' (Revelation 21:1)

Secondly, that God's plan for the future is that his kingdom will come and people will be supported by his love - even beyond the grave.

St Paul writes, 'For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8: 38 and 39).

Thirdly, we are God's people, his agents in the world today and we are called to build aspects of the Kingdom following Christ's teaching.

'A lawyer, asked Jesus a question, to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets"' (Matthew 22: 35-40).

And from our Gospel this morning:-

'Then the righteous will answer the King, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?" 'The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"' (Matthew 25: 37-40).

And, finally, what are the values of the Kingdom?

'The acts of the flesh (i.e. the way the kingdoms of this world operate) are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5: 19-26)

And what is more, we live in the assurance that we are working to further Christ kingdom where, to quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

'Goodness is stronger than evil; Love is stronger than hate;
Light is stronger than darkness; Life is stronger than death;
(and where) Victory is ours through Him who loves us.'

Amen