

Sermon for Christ the King, Year B

Readings:

Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14

Revelation 1.4b – 8

John 18.33-37

It's the year 165BC.

King Antiochus IV is a powerful Greek King, ruler of all the Seleucid Empire, and he's threatening to destroy the very heart of traditional Jewish worship. He's banning holy books and desecrating the temple in Jerusalem by the sacrificial spilling of blood from a pig... Wars rumble, as they always do. And a rebellion is starting, led by 3 Maccabean brothers...

And the prophet Daniel writes words of encouragement, about a King who comes on a throne of fiery flames, with thousands upon thousands serving him.. and that a human being will come before the ancient one and will be given Kingship over all the people and nations; a kingship that will never end....

Jump forward... It's the year 95AD.

The Emperor Domitian has been ruling for 14 years. He has an inferiority complex and has recruited a personal choir to follow him around singing "you are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power". The state is oppressive, Christians are under pressure to conform, to follow society and to declare that the leader of a tyrannical political system is *God*.

And John writes words of encouragement, in a subversive letter to his congregations in the seven churches; an imaginative masterpiece including angels, and dragons and great heavenly battle. And John tells his people that God has a plan, that God is in control and that, through God in Christ, good will defeat evil.

And now it's the year 1925.

It's seven years after the end of the Great War and the world is still reeling from the toll it took and the incredible loss of life. Powerful dynasties have fallen; the Hohenzollerns, the Romanovs, the Hapsburgs... the mood of many is far from peaceful; anti-democratic and reactionary rhetoric looms, Mussolini has assumed full dictatorship and... in a Germany crippled by the harsh demands of the treaty of Versailles, Hitler is beginning his inexorable rise to power...

And Pope Pius XI delivers words of encouragement in a papal encyclical instituting the Feast of Christ the King. A feast which calls God's people to look to Christ and allow him to rule in their hearts, bodies, souls and minds. A call that suggests that the most effective way to restore peace to this troubled world is to recognise the Kingship of Christ...

The book of Daniel, the book of Revelation and the Feast that we celebrate today, all aim to give encouragement in times of political upheaval and turmoil between the nations. They all point to the image of a King; a ruler, whose reign will challenge the status quo and ultimately see the right side win, in that age old battle of good versus evil...

But in times of confusion; exactly what sort of King is it we're looking for?...

As we look, to the here and now, in a time maybe not that different from times that have gone before... What kind of king do we want...?

- Are we looking for a King who is going to sort out the mess this world is in?
- Are we looking for a King, who is going to insight rebellion and uprising against the authorities?
- Are we looking for a King, who is going to slay dragons and smite our enemies?

The problem, as I'm sure you're no doubt aware of..., is that we don't always agree on who the dragons are...

What we want is a king who slays the dragons we choose... A king whose enemies are the same as ours... A King whose laws will always fall down on our side and will always punish those who have

hurt us... But even in this congregation, we are unlikely to draw precisely the same lines of good and bad...

And so, at times of political turmoil, where we regularly disagree on whether our leaders are able to lead or not, perhaps a better question is what kind of king do we need...?

And so, we come to our final image of Kingship, from the Gospel of John. A story that perhaps seems out of context here, one that we usually read during our passion narratives in Holy week...

And here is a very different kind of King. A very different kind of leader...

Here there are no clouds in which he is descending, no thrones of fiery flames, no wheels of burning fire...

Instead there is a bedraggled, vulnerable prisoner, bound, chained and deserted by those who claimed to be his friends and followers.

This... This is the kind of King we get.

And this, is the kind of King we need...

A King whose kingdom is not of this world...

A King who is not drawn into cycles of repetitive violence, with his followers fighting to save him.

A king who denied suggestions that he was going to restore kingdoms here on earth...

Our King is not a king who marches out victorious on the battlefield...

But a king who gives himself up, willingly, to those who come to take him away in the garden of gethsemene.

Our King, is a king who wears a crown of thorns...

Our King, ultimately, is a king who humbles himself and dies, naked upon the cross.

And yet rises, victorious from the dead on the third day...

Our King doesn't need to play power games, seeking grandeur and giving himself titles. *You say that I am a king...* he replies to Pilate...

And yet, he is called Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace, Son of God and Light of the World.

Our King is not the Emperor who needs a choir behind him, singing of his glory...

And yet, when our King came in the vulnerability of a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth and laid in a manger, the whole heavenly hosts sang 'glory to God in the highest heaven'.

Our King, though he is God, *did not consider equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage....*

Our King is the King, who, *when he realises that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to a mountain...* He is not a ruler who is power hungry and boasts about his supremacy on twitter.

Our King, Jesus Christ, is *the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead. A king who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.*

Our King is exactly the kind of King the world needs at this time...

A King who doesn't divide us along well-worn battle lines... But a King who wants to unite all people, all nations, so that *every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.*

Ours is a King who wants to enlarge the borders of his kingdom; not so he can conquer, but so that he can stretch his protective wings further and gather up his chicks under them.

How on earth can we act in the face of that kind of king?

How do we respond today, on the Feast of Christ the King, to a king for whom our human definition of 'king' seems quite contrary and totally inadequate...?

We respond, in the only way we can...

By bending our knee in worship to him; praising him in words that never fail...

To him be glory and dominion forever and ever...

We respond by affirming his Kingship of our lives,

as our 9 newly confirmed brothers and sisters in Christ have done this week.

And we respond by serving him, in the only way that is worthy of him....

... by loving our neighbour.. .By coming in humility and seeing our bound and broken king in the faces of those we love and serve.

And then, perhaps, as we worship, and affirm and serve Our King, the kind of king we need, we will see his Kingdom Come not just as a sure and certain hope, but as a present reality here, on earth for all peoples and nations.

For his is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.