

Sermon 22 Nov 2015
Rev. 1:4b-8 John 18:33-37 'Reign of Christ'

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight our God. Amen.

Royalist, republican, dictator, prime minister, president.... No matter what your preference for government style, in our Christian tradition we are stuck with a 'King' model. Especially as the last Sunday in the Church calendar is always 'Christ the King'. We're stuck with the language of Kings and Kingdoms, of Princes and royal rulers, of courts and reigns. Jesus used it and we heard it in the passage from Revelation – "the seven spirits[a] before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."

I really don't think it is something worth trying to change! So we'd best get on with trying to understand more about it and how we 'fit' it into our world and lives today as we have chosen to live under the reign of Christ. And as it happens today's focus is the 'Reign of Christ' and one of the thoughts for reflection is that today we see a how in the person of Jesus – at this time and point in history a kingdom-collision between earthly (Jewish / Roman) and God's.

Another reflection point would be to join Pilate as he tries to untangle the crash-site by asking 'What is truth?'^{1*} John's listeners might well have responded with Jesus' own words when Jesus said: 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' "Jesus embodies truth. Jesus embodies kingship. Jesus embodies God." Jesus Kingdom is the true one in which we have chosen to live! cV

Next week we start the count-down Sundays to our celebration of Christmas Day and remembering Jesus' birth. But today we 'end' with a scene from the ending of his earthly life. It is what we now know, as his last weekend. He has been arrested, tried by his own people, found guilty but they had no power to give a death sentence. **So** he was handed to Pilate to be tried under Roman law, because if guilty under Roman law, Pilate could condemn him to death. Tradition has Pilate saying: "Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me."^{Vs35} But it would seem Pilate *isn't quite sure why*.

Today we heard his attempts to find out exactly what to put Jesus on trial for. As I worked on this I was reminded of our English saying of 'Putting the cart before the horse'. It seems to me that Jesus own nation and chief priests wanted the death penalty – so found / made a claim that would fit. You can hear it in the conversation between Pilate and Jesus eg. "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?*'"

Pilate wants to know: 'Are you king of the Jews? **And if not** what on earth have you done to get them so worked up??? – *Well, Pilate didn't say that last bit* – but I think it's there just behind the text! The debate or is it a dilemma (?), is this clash about rulers and realms, Kings / kingdoms, power / use of /exercising of that power. Jesus answer is 'both and' not 'either or'. Pilate wants **one** or the other answer – Yes **or** no.

Jesus says 'it's both yes and no'. **Yes** it is about radical change in daily living and faith which challenged the established religious power of the day, and about **living God's way** – **in God's kingdom**! **Yes** it is about 'now', today. Jesus kingdom of God was not some distant – heavenly 'dream', and it exists right alongside the kingdom of Rome. **Yes** it's about allegiance; priorities; who is our King and the truth of it...

And Jesus said – **it is a no**, it is not a kingdom like the Roman rule, or for that matter not even like Jewish rule. No, it's not like the traditionally understood kingdoms. **So** I had a quick look at King David, **THE** traditional model for Jews. We are not usually encouraged to 'remember' these passages, but King David unified the tribes and subdued his neighbours. 2 Samuel c8 records *some* of the "how"...

*1 Loader for 112215 *2 J Petty for 112215

“1 In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines. 2 David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute.

3 Moreover, David fought Hada-dezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his control along the Euphrates River. 4 David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstringed all but a hundred of the chariot horses. 5 When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hada-dezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them. 6 He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute.... 13 And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”.... phew!!!! That’s a **Traditional KING** – right?!

So when Pilate asked Jesus if he was king of the **Jews**’ Jesus said: “no”, not that! My kingdom is not of this world which creates and allows: murder, abuse, dictatorships, killing, terror and injustice... these to ‘rule’ as the way of life. **No**, that is not my way or what happens *under my reign*, in my kingdom.

Yes both can exist now, both do – in ‘me’(Js)’. ^{Vs 37} For this I was born, and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. **This** kingdom is established on earth through my birth and in me. I came to bear witness to the truth of it. ^{*1} ‘Jesus embodies truth. Jesus embodies kingship. Jesus embodies God.’ ^{*2}“The two kingdoms: "this world" and Jesus'; occupy the same temporal space. One is not here while the other is off in the wild blue yonder. They are both here, now; but different in expectation, attitude and worldview.

Highlighting the difference might be to draw on our passage from Revelation which speaks of God being both ‘beyond’ our time and within our time “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come,” ^{vs4} Firstly we have distinguishing features of ‘our’ king / his kingdom which are ‘grace and peace’. Loader asks: “What can be more important than to be in a relationship of grace and peace with this “one”?” **This is no loyalty** drive for a deity, a kind of distraction from everyday living. Its focus is on life itself and the one who is within it and beyond it, before it and its goal.

Secondly our God ‘is’, ‘was’ and ‘is to come’. In this ‘name-description’ for God we are invited ^{*1} to think of the here and now and to contemplate the spatial dimensions. The terms, "the one who was" and "the one who is to come", bring a sense of time and timelessness: in the beginning - and in the end: God; and in the middle of our living: God. This is all embracing, it combines a sense of origin with a sense of destiny and at the same time a sense of presence. God is with us, Jesus came and will come again.

The promise of continual engagement is held in this ‘naming’ of our God. God will come again we are a promised a God who is intimately involved in our lives, not far off sitting on a cloud in a distant ‘heaven’ and completely uninterested. God came to earth in Jesus – and so we claim Jesus gives us the ‘shape of God’ ^{*1} In Jesus we see the King, from Jesus we hear about His Kingdom and what it means to live in it. In his death we see full acceptance of the consequences of living in Jesus Kingdom.

To the ‘Pilates’ of this world: No, Jesus was not ‘King of the Jews’ that charge was false. But yes he was King of the Jews, the charge is unwittingly true. ^{*1} “He is a mad king: weak, crucified, crowned with thorns, pathetic, defeated. The Gospels tell us ‘King’ Jesus was about love and self-giving, it is this path that led him to his death.

His life and death is subversive. It shows in deed what Jesus taught in word: greatness is lowliness and compassion, the last is first, and loving matters most. Was he right? Is he your truth? As we celebrate his coming and look to his coming again, will you again promise, to live under his reign and allow him to continue the process of making us to be his kingdom and priests to serve His God and father? Amen