

Christ the King Last Sunday of Pentecost

22 Nov 2015

2 Samuel 23: 1-7; Psalm 132: 1-12; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18: 33-37

[Christ the King Last Sunday of Pentecost 22 Nov 2015](#) Textweek

The feast of 'Christ the king' provides a very clear example of a flaw in the unfolding of our faith tradition, and it is a flaw that seems to run through all the major religious traditions.

It is relatively easy to understand the process whereby we came to this feast day of primitive theology; and it is equally easy to see that such an attribution as 'king' has nothing to do with the insights and enlightenment revealed by Jesus in and through his life and teaching.

The Church fathers who established the doctrines, dogmas and liturgical calendars of our tradition must have skipped over the very clever and deliberate dialogue in today's gospel from John.

Pilate in this dialogue takes the part of the average church going Christian; seeking to understand, and seeking to make sense of a whole new paradigm that Jesus has revealed.

Like Pilate, today we too might ask the same, or a very similar, question of Jesus; "are you 'Christ the king'?"

And it is important for us to then hear the response; "*Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?*"

Now, we can then come back quite truthfully with the 'Pilate response': "*I am not a Jew, am I?*" or we can pause and think for ourselves, pause and consider what our response would be.

What does the title and associated feast of 'Christ the king' mean and symbolise for us?

We might of course easily brush this off as 'just one of those things' in the Church calendar, not really of any significance in the overall scheme of things; and perhaps that gives us a good reality check of where our faith sits in the priority of significances in our lives.

However, just by being here, on this feast day we can be misread into being followers, even worshippers of 'Christ the king'. We might also be even more actively engaged in the whole process, for we might retain for ourselves an unquestioned acceptance of this iconic representation of Jesus and his teaching.

Going back to the gospel dialogue; John is trying to illustrate for listeners a very different understanding of rule, authority and power; the attributes well accepted and associated with kingship.

John in his gospel has Jesus state very clearly that "*My kingdom is not from this world*"; that is, 'no, I am not Christ the king in any way that you would understand 'king'.

Pilate, like us, still not sure of what Jesus is actually saying then asks again; "*So you are a king?*"

And the response is certainly not a yes; rather Jesus reveals that his purpose, his very being, is to reveal truth.

And that is where the early Church fathers distorted the very different worldview Jesus revealed in favour of a worldview that perpetuated the tradition and the traditional power structures of both synagogue and church. And this is more easily appreciated in reference to the other texts set for today.

The Old Testament reading underlines the "*oracle of David*"; David was, and is, 'the king' of the Hebrew tradition, and being "*the anointed of the God of Jacob*" he carries the same weight in the Jewish tradition that Jesus, the anointed one, the Christ, carries in the Christian tradition.

David, we are told, is also [V5] the holder of "*an everlasting covenant*"; and as kingship is handed on through generational lines here we can appreciate why the early Church, a Jewish sect, handed the attribution of 'king' to Jesus, for it was so important, for continuity, that Jesus was seen as being of the line of David.

The tradition of King David, so central to Jewish faith is echoed in the Psalm:

10 For your servant David's sake do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

11 The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.

12 If your sons keep my covenant and my decrees that I shall teach them, their sons also, forevermore, shall sit on your throne."

That Jesus was seen as fulfillment, and so also continuity with that tradition became the lens that filtered his teaching and his reality for the early Church.

By holding on to that primitive tradition the early church blinkered itself from the new revelation offered through the teaching of Jesus; and here we are again, still holding on to that same distortion.

The book of revelation from where we get the second reading for today is a mystical theological dream, and the text can be twisted to support the idea of 'Christ the king', for Jesus named as "*the ruler of the kings of the earth*"; but that is really quite a twist

If we follow the unfolding dreamscape we can become more open to the 'not of this world' that Jesus reveals to us.

The opening address in the text; "*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come*", speaks to the 'us' that lives eternally and not to the ego self that is bounded by birth and death; rather it speaks to our higher selves.

Jesus is then named as "*the faithful witness*", the one whose world view comes from the insight of 'faith'; he is then further named as "*the firstborn of the dead*"; and perhaps that is a good title for us to consider for ourselves as we claim to be 'the body of Christ'.

Finally, especially for today, he is named "*the ruler of the kings of the earth*"; and to state the obvious, the 'ruler of kings' is not a king, but one who is above and beyond that mode of rule.

So what! Where is all this leading?

The real value in today's texts is that they reveal to us not a king, rather they reveal a Christ, and so too a Church, that is called "*to testify to the truth*", and to be "*the faithful witness*"

As more and more of the world comes under the influence of mass communication, social media, political spin and scripted newscasts, we might be the remnant, the few that have a mission and a ministry of making manifest the truth.

Following the recent events in Paris the headline in the US was "**Republicans Rush to Shut Borders to Syrian Refugees**"

The news reports of the terrorist drama included mention of the actual make of weapons used by the terrorists, Kalashnikovs; this was not included as trivia rather it provides a pro-US and anti-Russian spin to the whole drama.

And the sheer scope of media saturation regarding the Paris events, compared with Beirut or Palestine, suggests an inherent valuation of European lives over those from other nations.

The TV series "The X files" had the subtitle "The Truth is out there", and we are called to be seekers of that truth, faithful witnesses, and like Christ, we are called to make manifest a new rule of life that is not grounded in earthly power, but rather that seeks to live from a place that is beyond the fear of our own egos.

Perhaps we are "*the firstborn of the dead*".

Peter Humphris