

A Reflection for Christ the King – 22 November 2020

Come, let us sing joyfully to God!
Raise a shout to our rock, our deliverance.
Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving
And sing our praises with joy.
For the Lord is a great God
And a great king above all gods.
O God, in your hands are the depths of the earth
And the mountain peaks are yours.
Yours is the sea, for you made it,
The dry land as well, for your hands formed it.
Come, let us bow down in worship;
Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.
For you are our God, and we are the people you shepherd, the flock under your care.
If only you would hear God's voice today!

Psalm 95:1-8

Royalty has its own mystique – or not. I wonder if you have sat down to watch any of Series 4 of *The Crown*? I find it particularly compelling since I remember the events it portrays. Simon Jenkins slates the series as 'dodgy history' (The Guardian 17 Nov) in which artistic licence prevails. Certainly, fact and fiction are entwined in order to make good viewing. Did a young Lady Diana really meet Prince Charles for the first time whilst dressed up as a tree? Did Earl Mountbatten really urge our future King to marry for duty and not for love?

Today is the last Sunday in the Church's year and it is the feast of Christ the King. Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent when we will begin once again to prepare for the birth of Jesus and for Christ's return at the end of time. Today however we celebrate Jesus as king. Today we celebrate the fact that Jesus' birth, death, resurrection and ascension are all caught up in an everlasting reign without end.

It was Pope Pius XI who introduced the feast of Christ the King in 1925. The Pope was alarmed by a growing secularism that threatened to eclipse any understanding that Christ was king of this world. He wanted there to be a day in the Church's calendar which encouraged Christians to reflect on the beauty and glory of God - as described in today's psalm.

From the outset, Christians have understood that the kingship of Jesus is different from worldly kingship. Jesus is an odd sort of a king. He rules without fanfare or ceremony. He

wears a crown of thorns not a crown of gold. It is clear that Jesus is a king who walks not the way of the world but the way of God – and he invites his followers to do likewise.

In his poem *The Feast of Christ the King*, the poet/priest Malcolm Guite wonders if we can really bear to reflect on this kind of image of Christ the King?

Our King is calling from the hungry furrows
Whilst we are cruising through the aisles of plenty,
Our hoardings screen us from the man of sorrows,
Our soundtracks drown his murmur: 'I am thirsty'.
He stands in line to sign in as a stranger
And seek a welcome from the world he made,
We see him only as a threat, a danger,
He asks for clothes, we strip-search him instead.
And if he should fall sick then we take care
That he does not infect our private health,
We lock him in the prisons of our fear
Lest he unlock the prison of our wealth.
But still on Sunday we shall stand and sing
The praises of our hidden Lord and King.

In these ongoing challenging days, we have an increased awareness of the needs of others and our responsibility to walk the way of God in response.

Walking the way of God involves practical action. It also involves worship and prayer. As we read the psalm set for today, we find ourselves caught up in praise and thanksgiving to God, described by the psalmist as 'a great king above all gods.' The God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah is the God who created the earth, the mountains, the sea and the dry land. This is our Maker, in whose image we are all created. This is our God who we are called to worship and adore.

As we gather in worship, as together we sing (or rather say this COVID year) the praises of our hidden Lord and King, how might our understanding of the Kingship of Christ shape our response to the needs of others? I wonder if a nod to the other name for this Sunday, *Stir Up Sunday*, might give us a clue? Traditionally, today we are supposed to stir together the ingredients for our Christmas puddings! Reflecting this, the daily prayer for the week ahead asks that Christian people may be *stirred up* such that we will bring forth good works in and through Christ our King. As you reflect on the beauty and glory of God, you may wish to make the prayer your own.

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works may by you be plenteously rewarded; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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