

Sermon 23 November 2014
'Christ the King' Ephesians 1:15-23 Matthew 25:31-46

Prayer: God of our Lord Jesus, may you give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened to know: the hope to which we have been called; the riches of your glorious inheritance and your incomparable power for us because Christ is with us – now. Christ Jesus who after death was raised to being Your King, Our King, king of our world, our church, our lives. We give our worship, our honour and praise to you. Amen

'The End' – that's what today is in our Church calendar – the end of the year – the sun sets on another year of listening, praying, learning sharing, ministering... words tumble around because being 'church' – the living Body of Christ is all those things and more!

And so in our church traditions on the last Sunday of the year we celebrate "Christ the King". The highest place our ancient faith parents could give –because of their cultural contexts... Remember they lived with a much stronger sense of the 'King'. The way the Country's ruler exercised the power of life and death, the power to influence, the power to control, the absolute power of the 'King' – nothing like our lives today – *maybe in John Key's dreams* ☺ – but nothing like our lives. cV

Jumping sideways a little – I have a pair of sunglasses, well it might be one pair but it might be three, all depending on how you see things ☺. The frame has interchangeable lenses – With one 'frame' I can have brown glass to see through – or yellow glass or rose 'tinted' glasses... The colour of the glass subtly shifts what I see – how I see – or not! And just as the coloured glass affect my vision – so does time and culture affect our vision of scripture and the message. I think that at times we forget when reading scripture – just how different things were for them. They saw "Christ the King" quite differently to us. cV

Paul was writing to the church in Ephesus, a body of Christ followers who lived with the absolute power in the county being the King whose exercise of that power defined their daily lives. So for them it made perfect sense to make the highest position in the church – a 'King-ship'. And in our scripture this morning Paul is pouring out words to tell the people about their 'Christ – the King', about the power source and about the exercising of that power. ->

Paul places Christ **within** the circle of the Trinity when he writes of God the glorious father of Jesus – who gives the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation. He then prays that the Thessalonians (and so us) might **come to know the hope** to which we have been called. This **hope** Paul writes ^{*1} is the foundation to life in Christ – the foundation to life itself, the key of opening our life 'door' every morning and **getting on** with the daily tasks that belong to us, our lives as the place God in Christ has put us to begin our ministries. W Loader says: "Hope occupies the God-spot in our lives, just as God occupies the hope-spot."

Life is worth – worth going on with and we are to take note ^{*1} that the wisdom about this is not expansive knowledge or speculation about what *it* might turn out to be in detail. **There is nothing of that.** The hope is totally focused on God - so the details can be left. It is not a hope we control by having knowledge about it. It is **rich**; it is **glorious**; it is, in fact, **God's being**. It is not to be commodified into a package and put on the greed-shelf of spiritual consumerism.

Loader would tell us that we miss something from the Greek with the translation into English – and that is that ^{*1} in the Greek our whole passage is really one single sentence. So the prayer speaks into the God-hope put into our lives and it speaks about how powerful God can be **in our** living.

So when the prayer expresses the wish that we may know the power that this unleashes in us in 1:19, it simply continues in 1:20 with the relative pronoun, "which". The power which we experience is the power "which" elevated the dead and rejected Christ to the right hand seat in the heavenly realms – in

*1 Loader

God's realm. The power which placed all things under his feet" This power is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who appointed him to be head over everything for the church and placed him in the ultimate position of power and authority.

The power of God-hope is Paul's prayer for us to hear even in the middle of the darkest of times – and harshest of truth facing. The Christian community in Ephesus were feeling pretty power-less, pretty hope-less and struggling to know if they were in / had started the Biblical 'end-times'. And Paul drops right into the middle of that conversation – this prayer about the power of God-hope in daily life because of what God did in Jesus – the Christ.

They knew, just as we know that Jesus had been rejected in the worst possible way ^{*1} and here Paul writes that God affirmed Jesus in the best possible way with their language and their value system. The message for them – and us is clear. God does not abandon the one who loves. Powers that destroy do not have the last word. Love overcomes hate. God took Jesus home and celebrated him. The same God and the same hope is the life force of believers. It *could just* be wishful thinking. But it can never quite escape the charge that it is wilful defiance of what appears to be reality. Faith understands that and needs to recognise that it is often wilful defiance in the name of love", *so says W Loader*.

Christ's hope and ours belong together. What happened with Christ was the beginning of something that reaches out and wraps around all others and brings together a network of people who share the same energy, the same power, the same hope, the same capacity to wilfully defy what appears to be reality in the name of love. I think when Paul and the early Christians called Jesus their King – that's what they were doing – wilfully defying the current reality model and expression of 'King-ship'.

Christ's Kingdom is not how the world would see it – Jesus closing teachings to his disciples makes this abundantly clear. Matthew's passage today began with: 'When the Son of Man comes in all his glory... to sit on his throne in heaven... All nations will be gathered before him... Get the picture? King Jesus being 'King', including exercising the power of judgement – but! But what is Jesus requirement for judgement? Not as the world expects – and indeed he seemed to think not as some within the faith expect!

We want to be special – to be different – to be seen – Jesus had a bit to say about what real giving was about didn't he? The Rich man showing off how much of the loose change from his pocket could make the **offering bowls ring**? And the poor widow gently letting go of her few cents so they just whispered into place???

Here again Jesus starts his parable contrasting goats and sheep – to us it is this picture, we can easily see the difference – however in Jesus time – in Palestine today it is closer to this picture:

Hard to see a difference, right? This says to me that in Jesus time he was more interested in finding a life experience his listeners could picture easily and well – flocks of sheep / goats were a reality to his listeners!

Again it seem to me that Jesus is saying it's not so much what you think / say that makes you different to the 'flock' but your attitude and what you do that matters, that counts. ^{*1} Judgement will be by our fruit. What matters, is not our status or achievements, but our continuing willingness to let the life of God be lived through us, concretely: our love for people – and our love is shown through the gift of water, time, clothes, the little things that enrich and enhance and make a difference in another person's life.

When we love like this – in a not for profit way, in a sacrificial loving way, in a not counting either the cost or conversions, I believe we are living in wilful defiance of the world's expectations of what it means to belong to a successful, victorious kingdom where the winner takes all. And in His parable, Jesus says – do this and you are living in my kingdom now and always. The Kingdom in which we live does not end today – Because next week we begin again! Amen.