

Lord speak through my words and touch our hearts with your words today. Amen

Introduction

We come together today on the day the Church has set aside to celebrate “Christ the King”. As a festival day this is actually quite a recent development, having been instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, to be celebrated on the Sunday before All Saint's Day. It was a time when respect for Christ and the church was waning and he hoped that remembering Christ as the King would remind nations and their leaders that they owe respect to Christ. It was also to help remind Christians that Christ was to rule in their hearts and minds. It was moved in 1969 to it's current position, the Sunday before Advent, with Advent being the period when we remember the return of our King.

Christ is recognised as King throughout the gospels, starting at his birth when the wise men came asking for “The king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2) through to his death when the same title was placed on a sign above his head on the cross (Matthew 27:37). Jesus made it plain that His kingship was not the same as earthly kings, he came as a humble, serving king instead of a celebrated, served earthly king (John 18:34-37).

It's worth remembering at this point that unlike our current ruler, Queen Elizabeth, kings of New Testament time, and even until relatively recently, held absolute power in their kingdoms, the king had to answer to no one. It is hard to really understand what it was like when a single person had that sort of power we are so used to all the checks and balances that our country has built into it's governing structures. Paul tries to get this point over in the passage we read from Ephesians when he says “God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things” (Ephesians 1:22). Jesus has been made the King over all things, what he says goes.

Judgement

Our passage from Matthew will probably be familiar to most people here. It is a story that Jesus told regarding the final judgement, and this can be a difficult topic. Some strands of Christianity prefer to ignore the idea of judgement and concentrate instead on God's love and our experience of Him. Others suggest that if God is all-loving then judgement is inconsistent with this and in fact everyone will be saved. I personally find the idea that there is no judgement hard to accept particularly since several times through the Gospels, Jesus discusses the coming judgement and so, I would like to spend a bit of time considering it. Most weeks we stand and say in the creed that we believe

“He will come again to judge the living and the dead”

“He shall come to judge the quick and the dead”.

I believe judgement *will* come and this judgement will be carried out by Christ, the king over everything, there's no appeal after he makes his decision, no higher authority to ask for a second opinion. But at the same time, he is also the one who came to earth as a man in order to pay the price for our sin so that at this judgement we could have a chance to be counted as righteous.

Something that I hadn't realised until I was preparing this sermon is the problem of reading this passage with 21st century western eyes. I tend to think of a sheep as a big round woolly animal dotted round the fields and a goat as a much thinner, less woolly animal with horns generally found in captivity. Apparently in Palestine, sheep and goats are actually much more alike. While goats look similar to the sort of goats that we see in the UK, the sheep are nowhere near as round and woolly. It can be difficult to tell at a first glance whether a particular animal is a sheep or a goat. When I discovered this it reminded me about Jesus' earlier parable, about the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). When the workers noticed the weeds they approached the landowner asking for permission to pull up the weeds. They were told to wait until the harvest time when they would be able to reliably differentiate between the weeds and the wheat. Again, the difference between

the two categories is not easy to see.

We meet new people and we make judgements about them. Are they safe? Do I think I'll like them? These decisions are made automatically and are part of living in a world where not everyone is a friend. We meet people we know well, in church or elsewhere, and we make judgements about them. Do they look well? Have they had a hair cut? We also judge whether we think that they are a Christian or not. I think this passage needs to remind us that the identification is not as straight forward as we might think.

However well we may know someone, it is only at the final judgement that the true status of each individual will be known. I'm so glad that I am not the one who will have to make that decision.

One other thing that I would like to consider here, while I'm talking about judgement, is what the judgement will be based on. In this passage Jesus appears to be saying that the decision will be based on what we have done. But I think that this is an incomplete understanding.

Throughout the New Testament, the writers make it clear that it is through faith in Jesus that we are saved. There are dozens of passages in the New Testament, too many to list now, but there are

two which I think are worth mentioning. In John 10:9 Jesus says “I am the gate. Whoever comes in by me will be saved;” and also Ephesians 2:8 where Paul says “For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith”. I think that this passage is more in line with what James means when he writes “Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions.” (James 2:18).

If you struggle with remembering bible verses, another way of thinking about it can be found in the musical “My Fair Lady”. Eliza Dolittle, is leaving Professor Higgins' house after successfully posing as a lady of rank and is met in the street by her admirer, Jimmy. Jimmy starts professing his love for her and she interrupts Jimmy's love song with “Words, words, words! I'm so sick of words! ... Don't talk of love, show me”. Our love for our king and our joy at our salvation should cause us to show our love in actions, but it is not the actions that save us.

If you are at all unsure about what the judgement may hold for you, then please do something about it. You could talk to someone, John, Bryony and I are all available to have a chat with, or you could spend a bit of time looking at what the bible has to say about salvation. If you do want to read a bit more, I've put a list of some more verses at the end of the sermon to give you a

place to start.

This sermon, along with most other sermons are available to download from the website. The website address is on your notice sheets and the sermons are under the Resources section.

What did the Sheep do?

Going back to the passage, I would like to look next at what it is that Jesus praised the sheep for. Jesus didn't commend them for their fantastic preaching. He didn't commend them for the way they had converted thousands. In fact, Jesus didn't commend them for anything spectacular at all. He commended them for giving to those in need, for welcoming in the stranger and for visiting those that could not get out.

Charity, hospitality, companionship. No wonder the sheep couldn't remember doing these things. These are, or should be, every day events in the life of a follower of Jesus. I have to confess that Sarah is much better at this than me. As an example, if we are walking around, it is much more likely to be Sarah that stops to buy a Big Issue magazine than I am. Stopping and buying the Big Issue helps the seller get back on their feet but even if you don't have the money to buy a magazine, could you spend a few minutes to talk to them, it makes them feel like a person instead of

a nobody. One big issue seller put it this way, “As soon as you are NFA – of No Fixed Abode – you become invisible”. To me that sound like “one of the least”.

We also have Inn Churches coming up. This is another chance to offer food, shelter and companionship to homeless people in the area.

What about the last actions Jesus mentioned, “I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me”? We only have to look at our notice sheets each week to be reminded that there are people within our church community that are ill. Their names are there to remind us to pray for them, but also to help us remember them practically. We may not know the people well enough to feel that we can pop round for a visit, but I am sure that even if you can't do that, a note popped through the door, an email if they are online, or a phone call to let them know that you are thinking of them will not be refused.

We don't have a local prison, but if you can't get out and about, a house can feel like a prison. Even if they don't appreciate the singing, readings and prayers, I'm sure that the people at Oakworth Manor appreciate the fact that we go in to hold the services there, as a reminder that they have not been forgotten by

people outside.

These are simple things to do, but that just means that there is even less excuse for not doing them.

Part of the reason I stand up here and preach is that I believe that God will speak to people either directly through what I say or indirectly through a thought that gets triggered by something I say, and so I'd like to give a bit of space now to allow you a chance to think about what God has been saying to you personally and to make a response.

Heavenly Father, help us as we live in your kingdom to show our love for you by showing your love to those in need around us.
Amen.

List of verses regarding salvation

John 1:12

John 3:16

Acts 16:31

Romans 3:22-30

Romans 4

Romans 5:1

Romans 8:1

Galatians 2:16

Galatians 3:24

Ephesians 2:8

Philippians 3:9

1 John 1:7-9