Sunday before Advent

Christ the King (Year A)

In 2016 Eastenders soap opera actor Danny Dyer took part in the popular television programme *'Who do you think you are?'* where he discovered to his surprise that he was a descendant of King Edward III. He subsequently went on to find out that he was also related to King Louis IX of France. If you're European or descended from Europeans the chances are that you too are probably somewhere far down the line, related to royalty! But before you get too excited and rush to trace your family lineage, the chances of you coming into any wealthy inheritance is likely to be minimal as there will be hundreds if not thousands ahead. Succession is vital to ensure the continuity of monarchy. Under UK Common Law the sovereign's children inherit the Crown. Our current long-serving monarch Queen Elizabeth II's heir apparent is of course Prince Charles followed by his son Prince William.

Today the Church celebrates the feast of Christ the King; when we look forward to the time when the kingdom of Jesus will be finally and fully established to the ends of the earth. It is also a celebration that guides us towards the period of Advent when we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth and his coming again in glory and majesty.

Down the ages Christ the King has been illustrated in many works of art. The stained glass east window here in St Laurence Church depicts Christ enthroned as king, ruler and judge of all. He is illustrated presiding over two scenes; one from own his life, the other from that of our community in Thanet- the arrival of St Augustine who established the kingdom of Christ to this isle. The title 'Christ' (*Christos* in Greek) means 'the anointed one/king'. Yet Jesus' concept of kingship was a far cry from how most people perceive royalty. Jesus turned on its head the idea of status and privilege. For him it meant a life of obedience and humility; one that culminated in cruel mockery from his Roman executioners who saw him as a faux king. They beat him, anointed his head not with consecrated oil but with a crown of rough scalp-tearing thorns.

Let's take a brief look at today's lectionary readings. Historically, Israel's leaders were considered shepherd-kings and there were both good and bad leaders, just as there are today. Ezekiel 34 was written at a low point in Israel's history; the land had been invaded by the

Babylonians and it is a prophesy of judgement against Israel's leaders. It is written as if it were God speaking directly to the people. God, the great shepherd of the sheep said he would be their shepherd (34:15). He would search and rescue the lost and bring them back to their own land (34:12-13,16). Like a shepherd he would feed them, binding up the injured, and strengthening the weak.

However, to those bullying 'sheep' that ravaged, battered, bullied and scattered the weak - they would face judgement. This pastoral imagery of God as shepherd and judge is also reflected in our gospel reading where Jesus talks about the final judgement 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory'. (25:31). He will separate the sheep from the goats and judge his children according to their works. How they treated the poor, the sick, the hungry, the thirsty, those in prison. He made it clear that whenever they ministered to any of these people, they did so to him (25:40).

Returning once more to the concept of royal succession, Christ is the heir of God's inheritance. In Hebrews we read that God has put '… all things in subjection under his feet' (Hebrews 2:8) and in Romans 8:17 we read that as Christians we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ. Whilst Paul's letter to the Ephesians says that in Christ we have obtained an inheritance (1:11) we have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit as a pledge (1:13-14). The knowledge of this should have a huge impact on how we live our lives today. Paul goes on to emphasise what is ours - the 'riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe' (1:18-19). He concludes that the church (us) is Christ's body on earth and he (as king and ruler of all) is our head and sovereign.

As joint heirs of Christ in this place our mission like Augustine is to continue in the power of God's Holy Spirit to establish Christ's Kingdom here in Thanet. May we, as the body of Christ strive to be day by day more like our shepherd-king tending the flock, championing righteousness and justice for all particularly the weak and oppressed. For when we do so, we minister as if unto Christ himself. Amen.

Rev Andrew Jacobson

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