**Christ the King B**

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

**John 18: 33-37**

 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?’ Pilate replied, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

I attended the annual Bishop’s Study Day for clergy and lay ministers in the Cathedral on Tuesday this week, led by Bishop John Perumbalath, the new Bishop of Bradwell. It was titled The Gospel in the Old Testament, or something similar. And I learned many things, but the one thing that I took from that day above all was that we do Bible all wrong. 😊

How often do we hear the readings and then take them apart, but treat them as an outside entity – something to be studied and learned-from? Not in itself a bad thing; but we don’t always remember that this thing we call the Bible is a story book, a book full of stories. And most important of all, these are all OUR stories. They tell the story of our faith. So, far from standing in the world outside and looking critically or even dispassionately **in** at these stories, we need to OWN these stories, to stand INSIDE them and look at the world outside. Because we are part of these stories.

As my husband will tell you, I do guilt very well. In spades. And so I have carried the guilt of doing the Old Testament badly all this week. But today I am going to share that guilt with you and hope that you will not really share it, but, better, help me to own the whole story, from way back before the Jesus event, and to acknowledge that story as belonging to all of us, with us inside as characters in that story. That way, the Bible comes to be, not something that we struggle to study, but something we read **AS** a story that means something to us, our history, our heritage and our future.

(And if anyone should want to take up the challenge and read, let me know, because there are some translations that work well for study and others that work well as stories and I can point you in the direction, I hope, of one that might be right for you).

So that’s one long bit of preamble. But there is another bit of context I need to add about the feast of Christ the King. And it is that this feast is a much more recent bit of our story; our story is continuing to be written by those of us who are inside it and living it. Looking back to our keeping of Remembrance this year, as the anniversary year of the ending of the First World War, the years following the end of the war were quite bleak ones; the fallout was punitive in many ways. And so the Pope of the time, Pope Pius XI, issued an encyclical noting that ‘while there had been a cessation of hostilities, there was no true peace. He hated the rise of class division and nationalism and secularism, and said that true peace can only be found under the Kingship of Christ as Prince of Peace and King of the universe. And to that end, he instituted the feast of Christ the King in 1925. It was adopted widely by the Anglican Church only in 2000. But it is a great addition to our story.

So how is this idea - that peace will come - going to be spread? The Church has a tendency to try and impose things on us. Rather than ask what it means to us that Christ is the King. The gospel this morning was about Jesus’ exchange with Pilate. (In other years, it is Jesus on the cross). The main point they make is that we are seeing and listening to one who is sacrificial, obedient, courageous, compassionate, forgiving, gentle; one who doesn’t impose rules. And one of whom it is clear that everything he says to us about authority is actually about service. The kingly sovereignty of Christ is in many ways a critique of human forms of sovereignty.

So as we stand at the threshold of the beginning of a new church year - Advent Sunday is the beginning of the whole cycle of preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ in human infant form - in a world which increasingly demonstrates frightening parallels with the uncertain and intolerant periods that led to the rise of extremism in the 20th Century, it is entirely appropriate not just to praise, but to look back and ask ourselves some challenging questions too. Not only: Would we have recognized Christ for who he is if we had been there at his trial?, but more also: How do we as followers of Christ recognize him as King in our lives now?

What does it mean to proclaim, and to live according to, the one for whom the way of Love is the only way? Today is a celebration of a profoundly counter-cultural sharing in the One who is the servant, and yet also the Creator and Bearer of all things. Do we seek his approval above the approval of humans? Are we willing, like him, to testify to the truth, however unpalatable? Do we come to him – not just on Sundays but every day - with reverence and awe?

Quoting today’s gospel: Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’

We don’t hear the bit that continues with Pilate asking: what is truth? What, indeed, is our truth? And why are we so reluctant to proclaim it?

Doing this on the Sunday before Advent becomes the means by which we can enter the season of Advent and be ready to approach the manger.

And let us not forget Bishop John’s words on Tuesday about the Old Testament being an integral part of the story of each of our lives in faith: the vision in today’s Old Testament reading from Daniel gives just a glimpse of the glory and majesty of Jesus. This is only a part of it: As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; … A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.
As I watched .. , I saw one like a human being…   And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Miguel Pro, a Mexican Catholic priest during the persecution of Christians in 1927 was arrested and sentenced to death on trumped-up charges and without trial. He declined a blindfold, blessed the gun-bearing soldiers he faced, knelt in prayer and was then executed, standing cruciform with arms outstretched, a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other. His final words were: Vivo Cristo Rei.

His father, witnessing the distress of Miguel’s sister, reportedly told her: There is nothing to weep for here, my child. Vivo Cristo Rei. Christ the King is alive.

**Amen**