

Christ as King

What kind of King is Jesus?

On Friday mornings at 9.30 a.m. I have the privilege of attending Meadowburn Primary School Assembly. Allbeit it is done through the computer. But they send me out the link on a Thursday evening and then on Friday, I can join the whole school Assembly. This is how they have to do it because of the pandemic. They are all in their own classrooms and each class has its own camera, so I can virtually see the whole school at the one time and they can see me. Amazing!

It's the best that we can do under present circumstances but it is still keeping the children together and I'm delighted that they want to include me in the link for the Assembly.

School Assemblies are probably much different from how we remember them when we were going to school. It's very much about teaching children how to behave and explaining issues to them about dyslexia and other issues that affect the way that we interact with each other.

On Friday past, it was Anti-bullying Day and they were encouraged to wear odd socks, as a sign that we are all different, all unique, and we should respect our differences. The school made a manifesto and that was built around the theme of "saying one kind word each day".

The Head Teacher explained the science of kindness and that when we do a good act to others it releases chemicals in our bodies which make us feel good and lifts our spirits. This kind act will inspire others to do a good deed and so the cycle continues.

The young people really took this message to heart and throughout the week they have been making calendars with a kind thought for each day. They have been going round their classes and saying one positive thing about each person. One class made up an ingredients list for kindness – one spoonful of humour, a cup of positive love and so the list goes on.

They always ask me to say a few words at the end of the Assembly, and I encouraged them to keep saying kind words to each other.

Jesus would have endorsed all this. Perhaps today in our schools we are not propagating religion the way we did and yet underneath it all, I see the values of the Christian faith shining through.

What a wonderful theme to instil into the lives of children, and for that matter everyone, Kindness!

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the Sunday before Advent, and a time of preparation for the birth of the coming King that we celebrate at Christmas.

This is an important Sunday in the Church calendar, because it is a Sunday that informs us a lot about our King.

Our lectionary reading, which will be read all over the world today, is taken from John's Gospel, and it is the encounter between Jesus and Pilate. It is a critical encounter between those two men.

For it represents two kingdoms coming together – two kingdoms which are about to clash. The Kingdom of Rome represented by Pilate and the Kingdom of God represented by Jesus.

A fascinating duel that has much to teach us about the priorities and the ways of Christ's Kingdom.

But it tells us also, what type of King that Jesus is.

Firstly, he is a non-violent King.

He stands defenceless before Pilate.

Follow his ministry and you see that he led by example. He turned the other cheek and encouraged others to do this also. There was no self-ego in Jesus, he was completely self-less.

Yes, the Jews were waiting for a King like David, who would champion their cause and restore their nation, but God had other ideas. The King that would appear would be the King of Kindness.

Jesus appears on the scene to do the opposite of the powers of the world who controlled by force, he was offering an alternative way, and that way was kindness.

He teaches them that they are not to take up weapons and fight the Romans rather they are to fight a battle within their own lives. The war is not outside but it rages in the hearts of men and women, and Jesus personally enters into this conflict.

He himself underwent this battle with his temptations in the desert and throughout his ministry he was continually challenged by Satan.

What Kind of King?

He was King of Kindness.

If one word sums up our Lord, it is kindness. He was kind to all in need. The woman caught in adultery and thrown before him - what did she receive from him? She received kindness not judgement; the religious people of her day would have had her stoned to death but Jesus saw much more than a sinful woman, he saw a person loved by God; he saw a person whom he came into the world, to die for. He saw someone in need of his kindness.

I was at a funeral service of a former minister on Thursday. John Whiteford had been the minister at Newlands South before his retirement 5 years ago. I knew John through playing football with him at the ministers' five-asides' on a Friday afternoon which we played some 15 years ago. John was a gentle giant of a man and kindness shone from him. His service was so large that they had to use other rooms to stream the service into and one theme emerged throughout the service and that was Kindness.

In the service his brother-in-law, also a minister, said that John entered the ministry after he had a serious illness and then one day realised that a man had died for him. That man was Jesus, and John was so touched by what Jesus did for him. The Kindness of Jesus moved his heart.

Have you ever thought about that? That Jesus died for you?

We are going to sing a hymn now that speaks clearly about who Jesus was?

From heaven you came Servant King. 374.

How can we serve the King?

There has been a small group in the church that has been working with an organisation called Growing Young over the last year. At the heart of Growing Young, is working towards a Jesus-centred community, where the values of Christ are central – Kindness and Forgiveness – when those become the shining lights of a Church community, then that community will become a place of spiritual life and growth.

By focusing on Jesus' message, it will enable us to draw closer to Jesus, and our community will become something that resembles him.

That is why the Gospel accounts of Jesus are so important. In our reading today we encounter Jesus as a victim. He is in many ways powerless against

the power of Rome. He stands condemned before Pilate for doing what is right. He stands before the Roman Governor to answer the charges brought against him.

This is our King!

It's not fair! He has no support, and his own religious rulers have turned him in. Pilate asks them, *"What charges are you bringing against this man?"*

To which they could not give him a straight answer.

Pilate tries to find out more about who this man Jesus is, and the theme of Kingship begins to dominate the conversation. Pilate instigates it by asking him, *"Are you the King of the Jews?"*

If he was, then this was treason – that Rome would have someone who would stand in power against their authority.

But Pilate must have looked at this one defenceless man and thought, he is no threat. He is not armed. He is not even angry. He finds no basis of charge against Jesus and tries his best to set him free! But the Jewish leaders called for crucifixion.

The irony of this situation is that Jesus stood up for others and here he stands defenceless.

He is a King that speaks out for others. Standing up for the rights of the poor and marginalised. He had a heart for other people. That's what took him to the cross!

Science will tell us today that both victims and survivors of abuse suffer psychological, emotional, and mental trauma, with systems of justice often in favour of the perpetrators. Often, the victims are asked 'what did you do?' or 'what have you done?', just like Pilate asked Jesus in our Gospel reading of John.

The implication was that Jesus must have done something to warrant being betrayed and victimised by those closest to Him.

But the reality is he hadn't, and the fault lay on the other side. It lay with those who found Jesus a threat. They found Jesus as someone challenging their ideology. He challenged their safe boundaries that kept some folks in and kept others out. Through his wise teachings he was opening the door for the outsiders to enter, The Good Samaritan was a challenge to reach out and look after the stranger.

So, what does this tell us about serving Jesus? Christ calls us to be accountable to those who are unable to defend themselves as well as those who seek justice from all forms of violence and discrimination.

To serve our King is to reach out and serve others, especially those who are on the margins, those with no power, those who have no voice.

The irony in this encounter, between Jesus and Pilate, is that Pilate is the one in power. And Jesus seems to be the failed leader, whose supporters were not with him.

But, if we look closely we see the reverse. The seemingly powerful Roman Governor is in fact cowering before the mobs, allowing a death he knows is unjustified and only keeping the pretence of order. By contrast, Jesus heads triumphantly to face death, preparing to defeat it.

Although Jesus is heading towards what appears to be defeat, he announces his victory in his response to Pilate: *“For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth”* (Jn 18:37).

Christ's Kingship is tied up with his death. Our King dies, a lonely death, a painful death on the cross but the King dies for a purpose and that purpose is to usher in His Kingdom which will in fact materialise three days later at the Resurrection.

Our King on the cross became the King triumphant, but not in the ways of the world, for he triumphed over sin and death, and that takes us to the heart of our Christian faith. We have a King who suffers for us, a King who cares for us, A King who is kind to all.

What does he want us to do?

To become like him? Simple as that. To be kind! For, if His reign is truly of love, given, and nothing returned, no reward for being true to the faith. It is truly selfless, and John's Gospel speaks abundantly about such generous love, describing a Christ whose reign is incomparable to those of the world. There is no measure in the world against which you can compare. It is totally other.

481 – “Jesus is the name we honour”