

Christ the King

Revelation 1. 4b-8 and John 18. 33-37

We are given two contrasting pictures of Christ the King in our readings.

Revelation 1v8 declares 'I am the Alpha and the Omega'. The passage asks us to examine the scale of our vision of God.

The God who greets us in chapter 1 is the One 'who is and who was and who is to come'. Christ is 'the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of kings of the earth'. Christ, the Alpha and Omega, encompasses the entirety of history, past, present and future.

What difference should this vision of God make to us, who perhaps too often think of God on our scale, as an accessory, a family-sized, flat-packed, easy to assemble deity?

Here the vision is of God hughmungas, God almighty, God of terrifying beauty, heart-stopping vastness, of uncontainable mystery.

Perhaps we should, as the writer Annie Dillard says 'wear crash helmets when we come to worship. Sidemen should issue life-preservers and signal flares and we should be lashed to our pews'.

And yet astonishingly, this God loves us and sets us free. He has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve him.

Inspiring. Deep breath. Wow.

In our Gospel by contrast Christ's kingship, far from being 'out there' is hidden. The Jews who should have recognised their messiah don't. Worse, they prefer to make Caesar king.

'Are you the king of the Jews?' Pilate asks.

In this scene, an intense human and spiritual drama is played out behind locked doors.

Outside nationalistic feeling is running high. Popularists are everywhere.

Pilate is alert to potential disturbance during Passover. He did not want a Passover King to emerge from the crowds.

'Are you the king of the Jews?' Pilate asks.

It is a pity we can't hear the tone of voice behind Pilate's ironic question, for Jesus is heavily guarded. Not a promising start. A bit like Hong Kong democracy activist in front of the Chinese judge before their long sentence.

Jesus turns the question on its head by asking a question back.

'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'

This introduces doubt into Pilate's mind. 'On your own' challenges Pilate to move beyond expediency and reveal what he personally thinks.

In an earlier passage we learn that his wife has dreams about Jesus and warns her husband about making the wrong choice.

So Pilate defensively replies 'I am not a Jew, am I? It was the chief priest who brought you here. What do you think you have done.'

To which Christ the King replies 'My kingdom is not of this world'....

Jesus reframes everything. His kingship has a meaning outside the politics Pilate plays with the Jewish authorities. Roman politics will pass away. Christ's kingdom will not, for Christ kingdom is not shaped by Rome or Jerusalem.

To which Pilate retorts 'So you are a king then?'

Jesus replies 'you say that I am a king?'

We face the same challenge as Pilate. Do we allow Christ to be King of our life?
Jesus is a King who calls us to face the truth.
Do we accept or reject his kingship?

All future decisions will be made in the light of that choice.

In the previous prayer book there was a marvellous Advent Prayer. It brings together the Kingship of Revelation, vast and endless, with the Kingship of John, truthful, not of this world.

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us
in great humility;
so that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal,
through him who is alive and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.