

Sermon for Christ the King Sunday
before Advent. 23rd November 2008

Ezekiel 34:11-16 and 20-24

Matthew 25: 31 to end

“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.”
(Matthew 25:31)

On the occasion of her 21st birthday, Princess Elizabeth (as she then was) broadcast a message to her people, dedicating herself to their service. Some seven years later, after she succeeded to the throne on the untimely death of her father, King George VI, she renewed those vows formally in the oaths which she took at her coronation in Westminster Abbey in June 1953. At the time my dad was working in an advertising agency in Park lane, with offices overlooking Hyde Park. So I was there waving my Union Jack from his office window and watching the Gold coach pass by... This was one of my very earliest memories I was really,

really tiny!!!! I remember the sense of occasion, celebration and pomp and ceremony.

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. It is an image at the heart of the Christian tradition, and finds expression in many of our hymns, some of which we are singing today. Also in countless stained-glass windows. For example the stained glass at the East End of this church, which represents Christ in Glory.

The image celebrates the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Death gives way to life, goodness triumphs over evil. The complete and final revelation of the kingship of Christ will be at the Last Day, when he returns “and all the angels with him... [to] sit on his throne of glory”.

Yet, there is a paradox at the heart of kingship, of any monarchy, or any kind of political or other leadership. Those who become leaders do so in order to serve their people, and to

promote their well-being in every aspect of life. The sad truth is that the course of history is marked by leaders who have done exactly the opposite. They have taken power for their own selfish ends; they have sought personal gain at the expense of their people, and caused them enormous pain and suffering and deprivation. In our own time, dictatorships still flourish, despite international disapproval, political pressures and commercial sanctions levelled against them.

The Gospels tell us that the fullest expression of the paradox of leadership is to be found in the life of Jesus. Born in humble circumstances, he lived in obscurity for some 30 years before coming face to face with his vocation at his baptism by John in the River Jordan.

That vocation was tested as Jesus underwent a spiritual crisis in the wilderness. It was only then that he emerged to fulfil his call to leadership, and embrace all that lay before him. None of the claims that Jesus made

was for himself, even when he read in the synagogue at Nazareth “where he had been brought up” the passage from Isaiah beginning “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” and followed the reading with the words “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Some were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. Others were offended and threatened by Jesus’ model of leadership through service, and sought his removal. Perhaps neither side could fully understand that in all his preaching, teaching and healing, Jesus sought to promote not himself, but the glory of God.

However, there is one expression which recurs many times in the Gospels. Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of Man”. “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” This verse from St Mark’s Gospel carries perhaps the ultimate expression of leadership through service and self-

sacrifice, but it also carries with it overtones of the kingship of Christ. It is the same Son of Man who will come “in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his throne of glory”.

As Christians, we share in the glory and the kingship of Christ. St Peter calls us “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people”. That is a high calling to live up to.

The parable of the sheep and the goats tells us that we fulfil our calling – and are judged in our calling – by our willingness to see Christ in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. Jesus appears to be giving us here an agenda for social involvement.

It is an area in which the Church, in spite of its many failings, has been active over long periods of time. It is an area in which many of us already make our own personal contribution. But that is only part of the picture.

**Jesus is telling us that his kingship
is to be seen in those in need.**

**In caring for them, we are giving
glory to him. Amen**

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