

St Bartholomew's Burnley 23rd November 2025

Christ the King

For some weeks now our Gospel readings from Luke have Jesus challenging the economic, political, and religious basis of temple practice - he disrupts temple business when he cures the lame and the blind and he challenges the privileges of the Temple and their cosy relationship with the Roman occupiers. Likewise, we have been challenged by explicit and confronting words of Luke's Jesus to our own lives and the need to regularly take stock. The religious leaders and followers concerned with preserving truth as they understood it, and hopeful that Jesus may help them in their tasks while they lived under occupation, the temple authorities were perplexed and astounded if not angry that they themselves were the subjects of the condemnation of Jesus.

The alternative name for the day is the Reign of Christ. It is one I prefer.

In his temple challenges – the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Teachers of the Law are reminded of the sovereign authority of God in defining “who's in and who's out”. Nor is the beauty of the Temple that gives glory to God. It is God's grace which is the Trump card, and which cannot be limited or restricted by human action. The message is a reminder to them, and I suggest to us today, that theirs, and our religious tradition is God given, and the source is the Sovereign God. It is a tradition, as Desmond Tutu speaks about in his book titled, “God is Not a Christian” when he speaks with passion and scriptural justification that God is for all and especially those who are

excluded by colour, gender, sexuality, or behaviour. When Jesus invites the criminal to be with him in paradise, we are given a glimpse of God's compassion and justice, the call to be reconciled. From the love of God, we are created and to God's love we return. The reign of Christ is defined by the act of forgiveness, it is the gift of grace.

A few years ago, I read a book by Phillip Yancey an American evangelical, titled "Sole Survivor, how may faith survive the church". He tells the faith journey of some well-known, individual Christians such as Martin Luther King, John Donne, and Henry Nouwen. He tells how the church has bruised each of them in different ways, excluded and even denounced them, and how they struggled to reconcile the life death and ministry of Jesus with the church and the community of faith: yet each sustained a vision and a hope beyond the institution and kept a vibrant and prophetic faith and calling to serve the world. I know many people who have said similar things, who have moved parishes because they feel unloved and unwanted and others who have abandoned faith altogether because of our failure at times to practice what we preach.

I enjoyed reading the book and still recall it, in part because it has and still is part of my own journey. As I have just the said book also tells of the experiences and struggles of many of my friends and contemporaries, once active in the church but now suffering burn out, abuse and rejection. It is a story I encountered many times while working at Anglicare. This may in part be your story also?

Rowan Williams former Archbishop of Canterbury speaks about the task of the church as to inspire the people of God to express the hope of God's dream for the creation, and to be distinctive in prayer and worship. He goes

on to say how worship is the drawing together of the earthly life we all share together and when our Eucharist and gatherings are devoid of the experiences of our human family life our worship is diminished and our own salvation at risk. The kingship or reign of Christ as I prefer to describe is as one commentator describes it as the space, we all inhabit. It exists in every region, every home, every parish where God's unconditional love and hospitality is present and shared. It happens when unjust laws are overturned, war is averted, and when we all join together to right poverty and to erase ignorance. In essence it is humble service to the truth.

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The kingship of Jesus' is not of this world. He does not rule as the monarchs we have known with pomp, wealth and ceremony, but for the reason that Saint Paul tells us in our Second Reading, so that we may find redemption and forgiveness (cf. Col 1:13-14). For the grandeur of his kingdom is not power as defined by this world, but the love of God, a love capable of encountering and healing all things. Christ gave himself for the world, to each one of us out of this love, he lived our human misery, he suffered the lowest point of our human condition: injustice, betrayal, abandonment; he experienced death, the tomb, hell. Jesus lived as a shepherd one, caring and protecting those who followed him and for all. Jesus the King went to the ends of the universe to embrace and save every living being. He did not condemn us, nor did he conquer us, and he never disregarded our freedom, but he paved the way with a humble love that forgives all things, hopes all things, sustains all things (cf. 1 Cor 13:7). This love alone overcame and continues to overcome our worst enemies: sin, death, fear.

The Feast of Christ the King reminds us that it was the victim, the persecuted one that reached out and offered a helping hand. It is the one who was abused and spat upon by those who persecuted him and sent him to death, who had the final word. Once these truths have been understood, the true meaning of Christ kingship is apparent.

Today celebration calls us all to reflect on our own leadership as parent, carer, friend, business colleague, clergy, professional, teacher, fund manager, politician, shop keeper or whatever. Leadership in whatever place is to be understood as servant leadership. Leadership for the benefit of others. So may it be for us.

Amen.