**Christ the King Nov 21st 2021 Talk by Pam Rosewarne**

Today is recognised as the last Sunday of the church’s year, so many might think it right and proper to end the year on a joyous note of triumph and glory. To recognise that Jesus, Christ, God ( whatever you want to call him ) is King and rules in our hearts always. Lets enjoy the majestic and triumphant hymns we are singing today.

And these themes are there in our readings this morning. We read from the book of Daniel ‘to him was given dominium and glory and kingship, that all peoples and nations should serve him’, and from Psalm 93 that Sue read ‘The lord is king, he is robed in majesty, he has established the world, it shall never be moved.’ We think of God as a mighty ruler, one who directs us, leads us, as well as one who loves us and cares for us. We talk of God’s kingdom in heaven and on earth and recognise that, if God has a kingdom, then he must be a King.

In the gospel reading today however we see a different side to things. In it we are taken back to the days just before Jesus’ death. We see Jesus brought to Pilate by the Jews who are seeking for Pilate to sentence Jesus to death. Jews themselves cannot make this judgement, so they brought Jesus to a higher authority than them, Pilate. As we know they were at that time highly vexed with Jesus and wanted to be rid of him. But Pilate is unsure. He asks what the charges are against Jesus. He asks Jesus ‘Are you the king of the Jews.? Jesus doesn’t answer to that, he doesn’t think of himself as a king, and was not aware that that was the charge against him anyway. Jesus asks Pilate if that was what he thought himself, or if others had put him up to it. Pilate can’t seem to fathom out why the Jews want rid of this man, one of their own. So Pilate answers ‘ I’m not a Jew am I , I don’t know! Your own people have handed you over to me, what have you done? ‘ Jesus does not think of himself as a king, although he does refer to his world as a ‘kingdom’. When Jesus talks of his ‘kingdom’ being not of **this** world this confuses Pilate more. He says to him ‘so you **are** a king then?’

The significance of this reading for today is that at its heart it is a debate about Kingship. But Jesus did not want to be a King with power and authority like most kings, he did not want to force people to follow him, but for them to **choose** to follow him because they loved him. The only rules he wanted was for them to love him and their fellow men. If Jesus was a king he was the king of love, not of control. He died for us because he loved us. In love he rescued us from death and wants us to be part of his kingdom of love. Every time we try to love and seek to do his will we are part of his kingdom. But Pilate has no understanding of this sort of king or Kingdom.

The online bible study group which has been meeting all through the lockdown and beyond has recently been reading and discussing a booklet ‘Jesus Then and Now’ by John Simmonds. It has been a strange sort of book, with, to me, some strange ideas, but it has provoked some interesting conversations between the attendees. One of John Simmond’s views is that the ‘Jesus’ as he was described in the early days of his ministry has changed very much over the many centuries since then. Back in the day he was portrayed as a gentle man, a loving yet charismatic figure, a prophet, teacher, and healer. He followed his Jewish faith, went to the synagogue, and respected the Jewish law and way of life. He also showed a deep commitment to God, and is seen living out his intimate love of God in his relationships with others, especially outcasts and sinners. This idea particularly upset the Jewish Pharisees and Saducees.

The booklet considers this first view of Jesus and how he was first perceived by his followers..friendly, loving, caring, welcoming to everyone including outcasts and offenders. And It goes on to describes how over the years ‘the church’ has put Jesus up on a pedastle, raising the image of Jesus from being humble to being more equal to God, attributing more glory and power to him despite that this was a position Jesus himself did not want to be seen in. John Simmonds considers the reason for this.

 Firstly the leadership passed to the Gentiles, as the Jews turned against Jesus, and the followers were Gentiles. This meant some of the principles of Jewish law became eroded.

Secondly the emphasis on ‘the kingdom’ became heightened as the second coming promised by Jesus didn’t come. Something had to be put in its place, and in due course the Christian community became central to the message.

Thirdly the arrival of Paul brought another new slant on the thinking. He was a more pessimistic person than Jesus, and believed people are innately sinful, incapable of obeying God, and lost, without the saving grace of Christ. Paul took on a central role in travelling the world and spreading the message of Jesus, and inevitably his own particular slant of Jesus was the message we got. The early church began to raise up the godhead and the gap between those in authority and those ‘being led’ became wider. The religion of the early church began to focus on the need for a mediator, who would intercede on our behalf with God ‘up there’ in heaven. Most people may recognise this practice adopted particularly by Roman Catholics, where the church used Mary to intercede with God the father on our behalf. Little by little the Christ of Pauline theology and of the Gentile church took over from the humble man of Galilee.

It is interesting to see how different theories and beliefs materialised over the two thousand years from the time of Jesus but I feel it is sad that it has changed the way we now might view Jesus. If Jesus’ message is to love your neighbour why has ‘the church’ spent so many years focussing on other things, and losing sight of the person Jesus really was?. Like building so many wonderful churches with beautiful stained glass windows in an attempt to glorify and magnify God, I think here from our own Westminster abbey to the small but beautiful churches I saw when on holiday for example on the Greek islands, situated in some poor areas. Would not the money spent on creating these buildings have been better spent on the poor?

But it does confuse me, as part of me **wants** to applaud Christ as King because he **was** wonderful to do the things he did for us, **he did die** for us all to save us. I want to **praise** God for loving and caring for me. I **want** to sing the hymns of praise.

But I also know that to follow Jesus I must be like the ‘old’ Jesus, loving my neighbours, caring for them and helping where I can. During the last couple of years there seems to have been a resurgence of people’s recognition of others’ needs, and a willingness to help others. Maybe the two views are not irreconcilable, so long as we do put our emphasis on the ‘old’ Jesus and his ways. Maybe the beauty of buildings, the power of music and words help to feed our souls and nuture in us the desire to follow Jesus and his example.

I hope the words of the following hymn ‘the Servant King’ help to put these ideas into perspective for you as they did for me.