

## Sermon for Christ the King – Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2015

Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14

Revelation 1: 4b-8

John 18: 33-37

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King.

Recently at the clergy conference that Maurice and I attended the theme was 'Proclaim the good news of the Kingdom,' one of the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission. As you might imagine, we pulled that sentence apart. What does it mean to 'proclaim'? What's the 'good news' that we want to convey? And most controversially, what *is* the 'Kingdom'?

I say controversially because the word 'Kingdom' has many different connotations depending on context. For a Western child fed on a diet of Disney, it's a place where the King and Queen and probably several princesses live. A magical place where magical things happen, where all your dreams come true. For someone living in Bahrain, on the other hand, where the human rights record of that Kingdom is mixed, the word 'Kingdom' could be less positive. But in Jesus' world the words 'King and Kingdom' would *not* have been ambivalent. The disciples would have known what they understood by a 'King' and therefore a Kingdom. 'King' was a word loaded with meaning – a word that could be dangerous at worst, misleading at best. Dangerous – because for Jesus to have proclaimed himself 'King' would have been tantamount to starting an uprising. Misleading, because if Jesus had called himself King, his disciples would have hoped for something that Jesus was *not* about. And that is of course, power. Jesus' Kingdom was not, and is not, one about power. Jesus said 'My Kingdom is not of this world. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth'.

The Kingdom, it seems, is about truth. And we live in a world crying out for answers in the midst of what seems to be ever nearer, and ever increasing chaos. The world is crying out for answers. For some sense to be made of the violence, and the horror, that many millions suffer in the wake of.

Jesus was born to testify to the truth of his Kingdom. And we, baptised into the life of Christ, are called to proclaim this Kingdom – and to testify to the truth. Yet, *out there* - truth is possibly more slippery than it's ever been. There are ever more sources of *information*, but yet these conflict, competing for space in the 'blue sky' that is the truth. What 'truths', if any (for example), are we being told about the wars being waged on our behalf, in our name?

The world is crying out for answers, and if we have anything to say to the world about the good news of the Kingdom, it has to be the truth as we testify to it, as we have experienced it. Regardless of our differences of theology or tradition, there is a truth we can witness to, a truth we *must* witness to, particularly now. And that is that the answer to violence is not more violence, but peace, love and forgiveness. 'My Kingdom is not of this world' says Jesus. A Kingdom not of power, but of peace, love and forgiveness. The everlasting dominion which shall not be destroyed, as we heard in our reading from Daniel.

Events of the last week, the last few months, could fill us with terror if we let them. The backlash against what happened in France last weekend began within hours of the atrocities committed in Paris. Strikes in Syria – who knows with what results? The hunt for all of the perpetrators. Shoot to kill. The world's answer to the question of violence is so often more violence.

So we witness to another truth. We proclaim a Kingdom not of this world. We must proclaim peace founded on love for one's enemies, forgiveness where there is a desire for revenge. I've been thinking of the response of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in South Carolina, when nine of its members were murdered in June in a race hate attack. The response of the families was unilaterally to forgive. As one man said 'We have no room for hating so we have to forgive.' A man who lost his wife in the events in Paris last week addressed the perpetrators: 'I won't give you the gift of hating you.' *These* are the words that disarm. The words that say 'No more. We are not made for this but for another Kingdom.'

How else do we provide answers to what happened in Paris – and to what happened in Ankara last month and in Beirut last week, and has been happening for the last 50 years in Palestine. The world certainly has no answers. The ‘Kings’ of this world – our government along with many others – can only take up arms as the answer. If we don’t proclaim peace where there is conflict, love where there is hatred, forgiveness where there is a desire for revenge, who will?

And we can testify to these things because this is how God has revealed himself to each one of us as his beloved child. He speaks peace when I would be anxious. He speaks words of love when I want to be angry, to rail against him. He speaks forgiveness when I find it so difficult to forgive myself.

These are the truths we testify to, the Kingdom we must proclaim, because they are true in our lives and are true for all who would seek God and Christ’s Kingdom. Back to Disney. I’d like the Kingdom to be a place where our come true – our dreams of peace, love and forgiveness. Where what we say in church shines forth in our private and public lives. Where what we pray for, we also strive for, demonstrate for, agitate for. Where what we say we long for, we also act upon. Jesus said ‘My Kingdom is not of this world; I came into the world to testify to the truth.’ These are the truths we must testify to. God’s gifts of peace, love and forgiveness. The gifts of God to us are gifts for the whole world. Who will proclaim them if we don’t?