

## CHRIST THE KING

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 23 October 2016

Colossians 1:15-20, Luke 23:33-43

[MW16-34]

Today, the Sunday before Advent, has for many years now

- been set aside in our church calendars to celebrate "Christ the King" a day when we remember and celebrate that Jesus Christ is King *the King!*
- there's a story I like about a king ...

The lion is the king of the jungle - everybody, but everybody knows that! One day a lion is walking proudly, majestically, regally, through the jungle. He sees a snake, "Who is the king of the jungle?" roars the lion. "You are O mighty lion," says the snake slithering low. The lion walks on and sees a monkey and roars, "Who is the king of the jungle?". The monkey bows low, "You are O mighty lion." Further along the lion comes across an elephant and roars, "Who is the king of the jungle?" The elephant picks up the lion with his trunk, whirls him around and dashes him against a tree. The lion, dazed and seeing stars, looks up at the elephant and says, "Just because you don't know the answer is no reason to get violent!"

Perhaps today this whole concept of kingship

- extreme hierarchy, total, unquestionable authority is seen as backward looking, out of date especially in our democratic, egalitarian, equal opportunity society
- yet perhaps this is all the more reason to highlight "Christ the King"

This celebration is a relative latecomer to the church calendar

- it is also a sign of ecumenism and breaking down traditional barriers this celebration is the creation of Pope Pius IX back in 1925
- the church had always celebrated images of 'Christ as King' but it was really needed at that time
- Mussolini had been head of Italy for three years the church in Mexico was being persecuted and priests arrested and shot a rabble-rouser named Hitler had been out of jail for a year his Nazi party was growing in popularity
- the world lay in the grip of the Great Depression

In such a time Pope Pius IX asserted that in spite of all this Christ is "King of the Universe"

- this celebration became the church's great *nevertheless* to the godlessness of the modern world
- despite the dictators, gloom, modernism "Christ the King" said loudly, boldly, clearly *nevertheless* Jesus Christ is Lord, and he shall reign forever and ever and ever
- so today as we gather here we are proclaiming loudly, boldly, clearly that Jesus Christ is King ... no matter what

Of course the fact of the matter is that it sure does not look like Jesus Christ is King

- when we look at what is going on around us so how does this work? that in spite of everything Christ is King?
- we get a sense of how it works in the reading from Colossians 1:15 -20 Paul wrote this stunning short letter from prison proclaiming Christ's victory over the "powers"

We might shake our heads and say what on earth are these powers?

- however the recipients of this letter would have understood clearly for they lived in a world of “powers”
- when things went wrong, people did not blame each other they named supernatural culprits they traced problems to the actions of the “gods” in the heavens
- they thought the world was full of hostile or potentially hostile forces so if you were going on a sea voyage, make peace with the sea-god first fighting a war? better get Mars on your side in love? make sure you have the help of Aphrodite

Many people went about their daily business in a climate of fear and uncertainty

- they did their best to stay out of trouble but often their best was not good enough and the 'demons' that lurked behind every bush would get them anyway
- now you may be tempted to laugh at these people living in the grip of such “powers”
- or perhaps you can all too easily identify with them ...

Today the question is: what “powers” surround us, surround you?

- what “powers” have a measure of control on your life?  
your job, fear of losing your job  
desire for security, debt or fear of debt
- fear of what may happen, not knowing what is going to happen  
worrying about your children, your friends, your relationship
- maybe something that is your pride and joy  
house, section, car, music collection  
television, sport, hobby
- bigger things like world peace or the lack of it  
people suffering

These “powers” need not be evil, insidious things

- they can be forces beyond our control like the weather or the economy ... the economy dictates the lives of millions of people but have you ever seen it?
- then there are similar forces or “powers” like the 'political situation' 'consumer confidence', the 'national mood', the media
- yes, today, 1960 or so years after Paul wrote to the church in Colossae the “powers” still seem to abound ...  
... yet they are not and will not be ultimately victorious

Today on this special Sunday

- we proclaim again the eternal truth Paul wrote to the Christians at Colossae: Jesus Christ came into the world to do business with “the powers” to live where we live to confront these powers ... and to triumph!

On the cross Christ has defeated the powers

- the decisive battle has been won  
for sure there is some mopping up to be done  
there are still struggles in daily living
- but we know in whose hands the final victory is held

Perhaps this is one way to illustrate it:

An elderly man emerged from a bomb shelter in London after a night of terrible bombing. Amid the rubble was a youthful newspaper seller, hawking the morning paper. The seller asked the man "Don't you want to buy a newspaper? Find out who won the battle last night?" "I don't need to read the papers sonny," replied the old man. "I don't need to read the papers to find out who won the battle, because I already know who has won the war."

The powers have been put in their place by Christ the King!

- and what a "king"  
did you notice our reading from Luke's gospel?  
it is the one set down for today, for the celebration instituted by Pope Pius IX
- did you find it curious that we heard about the crucifixion  
on this celebration of Christ the King?
- after all, if there was ever a low tide in the kingship of Christ, this was surely it  
his life and work mocked, his hope crushed, as he died on the cross  
surely at this moment he was least a king

"If you are a king" they said ... "If you are a king, save yourself!"

- but of course he is not a king in the only terms they could understand  
for it was by dying Jesus displays the kind of king he is  
one who suffers in the trust of God and punishes no one
- and yes, he does have a kingdom  
though not in the way normally understood
- a kingdom established by showing what God is like  
a kingdom established by exposing the fragility of every human achievement  
and contrasting that with the permanence of the love of God
- a kingdom established by building bridges  
building bridges between us and God, us and others we live amongst  
us and our lost innocence
- all in God's gracious embrace

And today, today as we gather here

- and as we come forward and share at the Lord's table  
we are a sign of that kingdom

As to the how and why of this

- I would like to conclude by sharing this true story with you

The quiet surface of Brixham harbour, shimmering gold only moments before, was darkening now as the autumn sun dipped below the horizon, and the masts and spars of the trawling vessels lying peacefully at anchor began to form shadowy crosses against the twilight sky. Looking down from the parsonage garden, the Rev. Henry Lyte could see symbolized in all these things the tragic story of his life. The twenty-four years he had spent as the Anglican parson of Brixham, England had seemed for the most part bright and golden indeed, but now, during the final days of his ministry, dark clouds of unprovoked anger and senseless dissension had appeared. It was the eventide of his life, he knew, and with seriously failing health there would be no strength for the patching up of difficulties - no fresh start. The kind of life he had tried to live and to give the villagers had been crucified by their hatred; it was as if he had never worked and lived and prayed among them at all.

The dejected pastor, barely able to carry the double burden of sickness and defeat, walked slowly toward the house and, without disturbing the other members of his family, slipped quietly into his study. There on the desk lay his well-thumbed Bible, open at the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel. He placed his forefinger on the margin of the twenty-ninth verse and read in a whisper the familiar plea made by the disciples to Jesus: 'Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent' (KJV). The day was far spent, to be sure. There might be time, his doctor had said, for a leisurely vacation rest in Italy, but beyond that Henry had no right to hope. What is left, he pondered, after hope is gone, after friends and health and even life is gone? One thing was left, he knew, just one - God. God was the ultimate necessity, and, in holy writ, God had promised to abide.

Henry Francis Lyte, suddenly strengthened by these thoughts, reached into a side drawer of the desk and drew out a sheet of paper on which he had written a few sketchy notes for a poem he had been composing, and within minutes the poem, 'Abide with Me,' was completed. Lyte sailed for Italy the next day but managed to travel only as far as Nice, France, where he died. Some years later the poem was discovered among his papers and was set to music by William H. Monk in 1874. Other poems subsequently discovered include 'Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven' and 'Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken.' They are now among the favourites of millions. But 'Abide with Me,' the song born in adversity, has become the gold of the church and has glorified the cross its author bore.

We have already sung "Praise My Soul the King of Heaven"  
- and for our offertory hymn will sing "Abide with Me"  
which includes these words:

*... when other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me*

*Hold Thou Thy cross, before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

Henry Francis Lyte experienced and gave us this truth  
- a timeless truth that Pope Pius IX restored and brought to the world anew  
a timeless truth we affirm by our presence today

*Nevertheless* ... in spite of everything: CHRIST IS THE KING  
- no matter who is President of the United States  
despite the continuing flow of refugees  
in the face of disasters like earthquakes and floods in our very own backyard

Nevertheless, nevertheless ... CHRIST IS KING!  
- this king, and only this king, can deal to the powers  
the forces, the temptations, the demands  
which threaten to overwhelm us

I invite you to reflect on this as we have a video clip of one of the new songs from our list  
- echoing the sentiments of Henry Francis Lyte for the 21<sup>st</sup> century  
Chris Tomlin wrote "Our God is Greater"  
- listen, watch, sing, reflect

[Video clip on Power Point slide]

The powers of death and evil no longer hold us in their grip

- the victory has been won
- now it is up to us to live like it

So let us proclaim this boldly as we march around our church building

- which proudly bears the name "Christ the King"
- this is a traditional thing to do on a Patronal Festival
- sometimes called "clipping the church"
- it reminds us that a church is not just made up of brick and glass and wood
- it is made up of people – us!

As we march let us also remember and give thanks for those who have gone before us

- if not in this particular building then on this site
- who by their life and witness testified that Jesus Christ is King
- yes, Jesus is a King like no other
- Jesus is the source of light and life and love
- today we acknowledge and celebrate this

So please follow me out this door, around to the left and down the side and around and back in the lounge door and back to our seats again ...

[music playing – Power Point slide]