

Christ the King, Stir Us Up!

John 18:33-37 [MW19-26]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 24 November 2019

Today in the international lectionary is “Christ the King” Sunday

- in the Anglican Church there is also the tradition of calling it: “Stir Up Sunday” after the prayer which has traditionally been used on this day this day which is the last Sunday in the Christian calendar
- the traditional prayer, in traditional language, began:
“Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord,
the wills of thy faithful people ...”
- through an association of ideas, the day subsequently became connected especially in England, with the preparation of Christmas puddings, Christmas cakes and Christmas mince
- in readiness for the Christmas celebrations

Stir us up as we prepare to celebrate once again the coming of Jesus

“Stir us up, O Lord ...”

Stir us up ... it is a good prayer!

- it does a good job!
because sometimes it is hard to be “stirred up” isn't it ...
- this Sunday comes at the end of a long, long season in church sometimes called 'Sundays after Pentecost'
- who can remember Pentecost?
it seems such a long, long time ago

Then there is the sense of things 'winding down'

- things finishing for the year
along with a sense of trying to get everything done
before the year comes to an end
- the finish line is in sight
can we make it ... can we get there ... ???

“Stir us up, O Lord ...”

I don't know how things are at your place

- whether there is a sense of wondering if things you have been waiting for are ever going to happen
- if there are things just not getting done
a feeling of heaviness, lethargy ...
- around here for example, we look out at our carpark which is still not sealed so we wait and we wonder and may be we hope too ...

“Stir us up, O Lord ...”

Let's face it – sometimes, lots of times, regularly

- we need a good “stir up”

Any of you AA members?

- ever had a flat battery?
you phone up and after a while the AA man comes with his power-pack
attaches the leads to your tired battery
and zap! the car starts
- that is what this Sunday is all about
God our 'power-pack' giving us a burst of energy to get us going

“Stir us up, O Lord ...”

What is just over the horizon, what is coming

- is so neat, so exciting
we want to be ready to get the full benefit
we want to make sure we do not miss out!
- something amazing is going to happen
something so out of the ordinary
that we take the time to get ready

Today is the day to 'be prepared to get prepared'!

“Stir us up, O Lord ...”

“Stir up” means to arouse, excite, provoke, urge

- what arouses, excites, provokes, urges you?
take a moment to talk with one or two people around you
- what does it for you?
what gives you an AA power-pack zap?

[anybody have anything they would like to share ...???]

“Stir us up, O Lord ...”

Wake us up so we are ready for what is coming ... and just what is coming???

- the Lord God, Creator of the Universe,
Maker of all that is, was and ever shall be
is coming among us as one of us to 'stir us up'!

Just for a moment I'd like to highlight the “stir up” image

- in some churches I have been part of
they put together, as part of the service
the mixture for a Christmas cake or fruit mince
- often the children put it all together in a big bowl
and everyone takes a turn stirring the mixture
- it's a great image and a great visual lesson

And then to highlight the “Christ the King” image

- it also helps us recognise and celebrate the kind of “King” Jesus is

How many bakers, how many cooks, do you know

- that if their mixture is no good, if their cake is about to flop
jump into the mix in order to stir it up again and fix it?

Yet that is just what our God was preparing to do

- seeing that something was seriously wrong with his mixture
that is, with the world and the people He had brought to life
- seeing that it was not turning out right
God decided the only way to fix it
was by getting right amongst it!

For that is what the Lord God did in coming to share our life here on earth

- I don't know about you but for me that is a pretty stirring picture:
a baker grabbing a spoon and leaping into the bowl
to sort out a flawed mixture
- a chef opening the oven and diving into a collapsing cake
in order to make it rise again

The Creator of the Universe, Lord of all

- coming as a helpless baby, in a cowshed, in a dusty village
well off the beaten track

“Stir us up, O Lord ...”

This last Sunday before the season of Advent

- (the four Sundays leading up to Christmas)
which we celebrate as “Christ the King” Sunday
is when we indeed remind ourselves that Jesus is the King of Kings
- and that one day he will return to reign in glory

In our Gospel reading this morning Pilate asks Jesus: “Are you a king then?”

- typically, Jesus does not give a straight answer
but then Jesus is not the kind of king Pilate had in mind
- Jesus is not the kind of king people then, or now, or ever, were used to seeing
and it is precisely because he is this kind of king
our hearts, our minds, our wills, our spirits are stirred

A while ago in my reading, I came upon a vicar reflecting on

- the things we've been thinking about this morning:
Jesus and 'Stir Up' and 'King'
- he used a film he had seen to illustrate the point:

I was watching a film last week, a good film called ‘We Were Soldiers.’ The main character was played by Mel Gibson, it was adapted from Harold G. Moore and Joseph Galloway's 1992 book "We Were Soldiers Once... and Young." Moore was the lieutenant colonel who in 1965 led the First Battalion of the Seventh Cavalry (ominously, the same regiment headed by General George Armstrong Custer at Little Big Horn) in the battle of Landing Zone X-Ray in Vietnam's Ia Drang valley.

Moore lost more than 70 men from his regiment alone at Ia Drang, and a total of more than 300 died during the Pleiku campaign of which it was a part.

Mel Gibson plays Moore, a devout Catholic family man with a wife, Julie (Madeleine Stowe), and five children. One the best scenes involves Moore warning his troops before they go into battle. He uses the following speech.

"We are moving into the Valley of the Shadow of Death where you will watch the back of the man next to you, as he will watch yours, and you won't care what colour he is, or by what name he calls God. We are going into battle against a tough and determined enemy. I can't promise you that I will bring you all home alive. But this I swear... when we go into battle, I will be the first to step on the field and I will be the last to step off. And I will leave no one behind... dead or alive. We will all come home together."

A man of his word, Lt. Col. Moore set foot on the field of battle first only to find himself and approximately 400 of his men surrounded by roughly 2000 North Vietnamese soldiers. The ensuing battle was one of the most savage in U.S. history, and the first major encounter between the soldiers of North Vietnam and America.

The film shows the two scenes where he lands first and leaves last. Now that is the kind of a leader that a soldier wants, somebody who will not tell them what to do, like an earthly king, but rather who will lead with his own life and if necessary lay his life down first.

That is exactly what Jesus did with his kingship. He warned the disciples that they would face death and horror, but he said that he did not expect them to do anything which he was not prepared to do himself first.

Stir us up, O Lord

We are 'preparing to prepare' for the coming of Jesus

- which we look forward to celebrating again at Christmas
it is a stirring story: are we ready for it and what it means?
- I invite you to take some time today, tomorrow, over the coming week to discuss, reflect, pray, about what this "stirring up" will mean for you
- Christmas will be busy I guess, January is holiday time
which perhaps means the new year really begins in February
- so what is God stirring you to do???
- what is stirring in your heart, in your mind, in your spirit ...

Stir us up, O Lord

The Good News is Jesus is Emmanuel, Jesus is 'God with us'

- Jesus is God with us to stir us up to be who we are created to be
- Jesus is God with us, the King who steps out first, is always with us
and promises to leave no one behind

Stir us up, O Lord

Be our AA power-pack

- give us a king-sized charge, so that we may leap into life – stirred up for you