

CHRIST THE KING

John 18:33-37 [MW20-43]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 22 November 2020

Today's gospel reading is a trial scene

- from the trial of Jesus by Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea and you suspect, at the beginning that Jesus could really do with hot shot lawyer
- but by the end you come to realise he doesn't need one

Pilate is the big shot, the one with all the power

- he's in charge of the Roman forces in the whole of Judea he represents all the power and might of Imperial Rome
- before him stands a bedraggled, bleeding, powerless, poor itinerant rabbi named Jesus
- yet as soon as the "trial" begins you realise things are not going to go the way you might expect

Pilate asks Jesus: "Are you the king of the Jews?"

- surely this is a joke!
the Jews are an occupied nation, captive, with no army
- Pilate stands there backed up by a huge Roman occupation force yet Pilate looks at this forlorn figure before him and asks: "Are you king?"

Jesus responds by saying:

- "*My kingdom does not belong to this world*"
and now this courtroom drama lays out its stark truth:
the kingdoms of this world depend on armies and violence for their power
- against which Jesus says his kingdom is different
he says "*my kingdom is not from here*"
- and it isn't
and it can't be overturned or even challenged in the conventional way

And that is how the tables are turned

- Jesus, on trial, looking nothing like a king
is in fact a king who cannot be conquered
- for sure he can be accused, he can be punished
but he cannot be defeated ...
- Pilate, along with so many others, missed it
missed what made Jesus different
missed what made him the one true king

In this trial Jesus goes head-to-head with the-powers-that-be

- and those powers crumble before him

Pilate, a military governor, couldn't grasp it

- the learned theologians of the day couldn't make sense of it
even today Jesus' portrayal of true kingship is hard to keep hold of
- which is why I am taken with Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's attempted explanation, which goes like this ...

A certain king was very rich. His power was known throughout the world. But he was most unhappy, for he desired a wife. Without a queen, the vast palace was empty.

One day, while riding through the streets of a small village, he saw a beautiful peasant girl. So lovely was she that the heart of the king was won. He wanted her more than anything he had ever desired. On succeeding days, he would ride by her house on the mere hope of seeing her for a moment in passing.

He wondered how he might win her love. He thought, I will draw up a royal decree and require her to be brought before me to become the queen of my land. But, as he considered, he realized that she was a subject and would be forced to obey. He could never be certain that he had won her love.

Then, he said to himself, "I shall call on her in person. I will dress in my finest royal garb, wear my diamond rings, my silver sword, my shiny black boots, and my most colourful tunic. I will overwhelm her and sweep her off her feet to become my bride." But, as he pondered the idea, he knew that he would always wonder whether she had married him for the riches and power he could give her.

Then, he decided to dress as a peasant, drive to the town, and have his carriage let him off. In disguise, he would approach her house. But, somehow the duplicity of this plan did not appeal to him.

At last, he knew what he must do. He would shed his royal robes. He would go to the village and become one of the peasants. He would work and suffer with them. He would actually become a peasant. This he did. And he won his wife.

A glimpse perhaps of the kind of "King" Jesus actually is

- for he is a King like no other
- and today we remember and reflect on this
- and what it means for our life ...

Now I invite all those who are able and would like to, to walk 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", and it reminds us that a church is not just made up of brick and glass and wood, it is made up of people! As we walk 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 and today we acknowledge and celebrate this.

So please follow me down the aisle, out the door, around the road front and down the side and around and back in the lounge door door and take our seats again ...