

Sunday 22nd Nov 2020 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m. Live-streamed, 9.30 a.m. Spirit of the Wilderness, 18h45		FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING THE REIGN OF CHRIST Sunday next before Advent
Ezek 34:11-16, 20-24	Ps 100	Ephesians 1:15-23
		Matthew 25:31-46
Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people...		

THE REIGN OF CHRIST

Today is the Feast of Christ the King, or the Reign of Christ. It is also the Sunday next before Advent, and is informally known as “Stir up Sunday”. This name comes from the beginning of the Collect for today in the Book of Common Prayer (SAPB), which begins with the words, “Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people...”

The Feast of Christ the King, the Reign of Christ, marks the end of the church liturgical year. This is a time of endings, and also therefore it is a time of new beginnings. Our Gospel readings over the past weeks have pointed us to the kingdom of God and the coming - the return - of Christ as King and Lord and Judge. So in the midst of the turmoil and uncertainty of these days, we are reminded that we are part of the kingdom of God; that we are citizens not only of this earthly realm, but we are also citizens of heaven, citizens of the kingdom of God. Our allegiance is not to the Prince of this world, who is Satan or the Devil, but to Jesus Christ who is our saviour and our Lord.

OUR SCRIPTURES

In the gospels, Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven. He used pictures, stories, parables, saying, the kingdom of God is like this... ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom (Matt 25:1)... the kingdom of heaven is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them... (Matt 25:14)... the kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field... (Matt 13:44)...the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed... (Mk 3:30f.)... the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea... (Matt 13:47-50)... the kingdom of God is within you (Lk 17:21).

What sort of a picture of the kingdom of God do we see in our scripture readings this morning?

Ezekiel – this prophesy came at a time when the rulers of the people of Israel had failed dismally in their duties. They had fed themselves, and not cared for the people. So, in contrast to these false shepherds of Israel, God declares that he will be the true shepherd: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep... I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak...” (Ezek 34:16).

But there will also be God’s judgement on the false shepherds, and on those who use their power to oppress others: “Therefore thus says the Lord God to them, ‘I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.

Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock and they will no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep” (Ezek 34:20-22).

In the kingdom of heaven, God is on the side of the weak, on the side of the oppressed. Where there is injustice, or oppression, or corruption, or abuse of power, God is not neutral. And neither can we be neutral in the face of such things.

Psalm 100 – deep assurance that “we are God’s people, his people, and the sheep of his pasture... for the Lord is good, his loving mercy is forever, his faithfulness throughout all generations” (Ps 100:2, 4).

Matthew 25:31-46 – is the final judgement at the second coming when all the nations will be gathered before the Son of Man. There he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. On what basis is this separation? It will be based, says Jesus, on the extent to which we have responded to the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, those without clothing or shelter, the sick, those in prison. We all have a deep longing for justice. At the judgement, “justice will at last be done”¹ Acts of compassion, acts of justice, acts of mercy, are signs of the kingdom of God.

¹ Wright, NT. *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2*, 141

AND SO...

The Feast of Christ the King gives us a vision of the kingdom of heaven, the new world. In the kingdom of heaven, the Lord is our shepherd who cares for the weak and the downtrodden. In the kingdom of heaven, we are held in God's love. In the kingdom of heaven, there is justice for the weak and the powerless.

Lisa Sharon Harper, author, activist and community organiser puts it this way:

“there is more than the brokenness, the destruction, and the despair that threaten to wash over us... There is a vision of a world where God cuts through the chaos, where God speaks and there is light”².

This has been a very difficult week for many. There have been deaths; the covid infection rate is rising; things feel very fragile, brittle. The economy, our political and national life, our community life – all are shaking. We watch with concern to see how the USA presidential election results are finalised. Former president Jacob Zuma continues to defy the Zondo Commission into state capture. We continue to hear of terrible instances of gender-based violence. Fr Michael Lapsley put it like this: “The violence of men against women is the oldest wound in human

² Richard Rohr, Jesus and the Reign of God, 18th November 2020

history. Stopping that violence and healing its wounds is the responsibility of everyone on the planet.”³

CONCLUSION

In the midst of all that is happening, let's live lives of love and compassion. Let's live God's dream for the world. Let's live with hearts open to God.

Ephesians 1:15-23 is a prayer – it is St Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus; it is a prayer of a pastor or leader for her people; it is my prayer for you and for us all. May we who belong to the kingdom of God know "... the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe..." (Eph 1:18-19).

And let's pray, in the words of the old Collect:

“Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Dean of Grahamstown
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³ Fr Michael Lapsley, 20 November 2020