

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> Nov 2021

St John's (MW) and St James (HC)

### Christ the King

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Revelation 1:4b-8

John 18:33-37

"...and they all lived happily ever after."

I don't know about you, but I love a good story. Especially one with a happy ending

But it *is* a strange way to *begin* a sermon.

Well, yes, but..... (as my children always used to say)

Yes, but... way back at the beginning of August we began our long journey through the Big Story of the Bible - and now we are almost at the end. Like all the great epics, the quest has been completed, the battle has been won, love is requited. Jesus has fulfilled his mission of reconciling us to God; evil, sin and death have been conquered; love takes centre stage.

Next week is Advent Sunday, and we reach the epilogue. The 'what happened' next, which is often my favourite bit of a book. I've grown to love the characters, and I want to know what the future held for them. Maybe one of the reason that I love The Lord of the Rings so much, is that the Epilogue is most of the final book!

But I'm getting ahead of myself...

Today, one of the great themes of the Bible reaches its fulfilment - the story of the People of God – *and who they looked to as their leader.*

We've followed the story right from the very beginning, where God's beloved children, exemplified by Adam and Eve, turned away from God's gentle care and leadership and decided they wanted to do things their own way

We've seen how God chose Abraham and his family to become the ancestors of a *people* who would reveal his love to the world

We've heard about the people's slavery in Egypt, about the Passover and their escape (or *Exodus*), about the Red Sea, the desert wanderings and their coming to the Promised Land - led by God through Moses, Joshua and others – leaders inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And we've seen the people of God settling in the land of Canaan (land of milk and honey), and establishing themselves as the nation of Israel.

Establishing themselves – carefully chosen words. For the Bible also tells us that the people – who had looked to *God* as their leader, albeit working through people like Moses and Joshua and others, demanded their own, human king.

So all the elders of Israel came to Samuel. <sup>5</sup> They said to him, “appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

Samuel... prayed to the Lord. <sup>7</sup> And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.... <sup>9</sup> Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.”

<sup>10</sup> Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king.

*He said (something like), “This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: A king will expect your sons to fight for him, and your daughters to work for him. He’ll expect you to work to keep him in luxury – you will be little more than slaves whilst he enjoys all your hard work. And you’ll wish you had never asked for a king.*

<sup>19</sup> But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. <sup>20</sup> Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

<sup>21</sup> When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. <sup>22</sup> The Lord answered, “Listen to them and give them a king.”

1 Samuel 8 paraphrased and abridged

So Saul became king, and began a great roller coaster of ups and downs.

King David – the great King, who God called the “man after my own heart” – and who was promised by God that one of his descendants would sit on the throne forever

The divided kingdoms.

Good Kings, bad kings, but overall the slide into worshipping other gods. The fall of both kingdoms, the exile of the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in Babylon, and the return of a small number of them to re-establish the nation – the remnant of the People of God. And in amongst all that, the prophets speaking God’s promise of a Saviour, a Messiah, one who would be chosen to be their everlasting King.

And over the past few weeks we’ve thought again about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of that Messiah – Jesus. Of his “ascension” – his return to heaven (“God’s place”);

....and then on earth (“our place”) - the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the early church.

But let’s just return to that thought of the “ascension”

Of Jesus – the Christ, the Messiah – returning to the glory of heaven – referred to in the readings from Daniel and Revelation this morning

“Him who loves us and has freed us”

“Who has made us to be a kingdom – to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever”.

And let’s just note that dominion doesn’t mean “domination”

More “authority to rule or lead”

This is an image of Jesus, the Christ, as the King  
We've picked up lots of these images in our hymns this morning – and some we aren't singing, like "At the name of Jesus"

Jesus, the Christ – the King of the new people of God  
No longer just the descendants of Abraham, who wanted a "proper human king like the other nations"  
- but the new people of God - everyone who believes and trusts in him.  
Once more, God is the King of his people.

And one day – as we will see next week, there will be a new heaven and a new earth – the new creation, where that kingship will be seen in full  
As it was..... "in the beginning"

So..... that's a strange place for "in the beginning"  
When we're almost at the end of the sermon.

We started with an ending – "happy ever after"  
And now we have "in the beginning" somewhere towards the end

Isn't that a bit - upside down?  
A bit topsy turvy ?

Well – yes, it is

Yes – but.....

That is the joy of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom that is "not from this world," as Jesus described it to Pilate in our Gospel.

It *is* topsy turvy

It *is* upside down

It *is* back to front

"the first shall be last and the last shall be first"

It's hard to grasp – the Kingdom of God

It's not a territory - a place, geographically bounded – it's wherever God's people – those who acknowledge Jesus as their King - are following God's ways

We see it described sideways in some of Jesus parables "The Kingdom of God is like..." a mustard seed, a sower. Images of growing and flourishing, starting small and growing huge  
In the Sermon on the Mount – "Blessed are those who are persecuted..."

We see it in Jesus' ministry of making whole, or restoration, of reconciliation

And the more the Kingdom, the Kingship of Jesus, is revealed the stranger it gets  
Palm Sunday - Jesus riding into the city on a donkey rather than a war horse  
Maundy Thursday – Jesus washing feet

The Crown - of thorns

Jesus lifted high on the cross – in human terms the absolute opposite of a throne  
The irony and truth of the notice pinned above him – “This is the King of the Jews”

And at the resurrection – Jesus being seen first by the women – traditionally viewed as unreliable witnesses.

The Kingdom of truth, beauty, justice, mercy, peace, – and supremely, love

For despite the pictures of heaven and glory and worship, the power and authority and majesty of Jesus isn't expressed like human power and authority.  
It's not about control, and possession and getting more powerful at the expense of others  
It takes that “love of power” and turns it upside down  
To reveal  
the power of Love

Not a saccharine-sweet, kittens-with-bows idea of love  
But a determined, earthy, blood, sweat and tears love  
A love that chooses to love  
To love the loveless, the unlovely and the unloved  
.....Including each one of us

The love which invites each one of us to step into and live in his Kingdom  
Set free from the past  
Set free for the future  
Set free to make that Kingdom a reality in the here and now of Shirley Parish.

Jesus, our King  
Offers us a new start

“In the beginning”

Amen.