

SERMON 21.11.21 John 18: 33-37 - Christ the King - Revd Carol Harley

May my words be true to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we gather with the whole Christian Church to proclaim that Christ is the King of our lives. This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year, before we start a new year next week with the first Sunday of Advent. Today the church announces that it bows only to Jesus the Christ. And today our very real challenge is living out that profession.

This discussion between Pilate and Jesus is unique to John's gospel, but I see it often reflected in my own life as I continue to try to understand who Jesus is, what he is calling me to do and who God is calling me to be in the world. I can't help but notice how often God shows me the answer and how often I tend to ignore it.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus makes it obvious who he is. The first words of the first chapter, tells us that the Word (Jesus) was in the beginning with God, that the Word is God and that he came to give life to all people. Jesus tells his followers again and again that he is the light of the world, the good shepherd, the living water, the bread of eternal life. Jesus tells Pilate that he came to testify to the truth, that everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. Then Pilate goes on to ask his infamous question, 'what is truth?'

What is truth? Jesus tells us the truth over and over again, but what difference does it make if we don't live that truth in our lives?

Who Jesus says he is matters a great deal, but how will it make a difference in the world unless we live accordingly? What matters is who we say Jesus is.

This conversation between Pilate and Jesus makes it clear that Jesus wasn't put to death for who he really is and was, because he came to bring peace and justice and offer the bread of eternal life. No, he was put to death for who people thought he was, for the threat they thought he was to the way they lived and treated others. Who Jesus is matters, but what matters almost more is who we say he is, who we show Jesus to be in our lives.

If we show Jesus to be dominated by fear and mistrust, we are not showing Jesus to be who he is. Increasingly over the last two or three years we have heard people of authority and the ordinary person in the street wanting to close their doors to refugees escaping war, starvation and terror. That's not the kind of kingdom Jesus is talking about, one that only allows people who think like him or look like him – although Jesus probably looked a lot more like a Syrian refugee than you and me.

Jesus has a kingdom that's not from this world. A kingdom where hospitality reigns, because there wasn't enough food for the gathered crowd, five loaves and two fish became a vast amount of food. It's a kingdom where leaders weep alongside their people out of love for their friends, a

kingdom where a woman stands all alone at a well is offered conversation, acknowledgement of her dignity, but also the living water of eternal life.

This is the truth to which Christ came to preach. Truth that is something that is done, rather than something that is believed or thought of. Jesus changes the way that we look at truth, the way we understand it. If truth is a life to be lived, not just a fact to be believed, how might that change the way Christ's truth is present in our lives? Because the truth we live matters now more than ever.

On this Christ the King Sunday, we are invited to take a deeper look into what Christ's kingdom would look like. As his crucifixion and resurrection made clear, Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. We see in the news about how worldly kings take power from others by winning battles. Jesus doesn't fight, nor does he allow his followers to do so. Instead, he offers an alternative. In his kingdom, peace reigns over war, violence is not the first answer, it's never the answer. In Christ's kingdom no-one will be turned away.

We live in a world dominated by the view that the only answer to violence is more violence, and the end result of that view is not life, which Jesus came to offer, it's death. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness. Darkness can't drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate can't drive out hate, only love can do that.

This is the truth, the truth that Jesus lived and the truth he came to preach, so that we might live it as well. The good news about this truth is something to be remembered – the truth Jesus calls us to, in this passage and in others, originates in God and not in us. It is eternal and constantly being revealed to us in our lives and in creation. Truth can transform us. By looking deeply at ourselves, we look at what is right and wrong in our actions and attitudes towards others and within ourselves.

Next week the season of Advent begins, we joyfully anticipate the birth of a baby boy, and the ways in which that birth will change the world. That boy came to witness to the truth that God is love. Jesus reminds us that he came into the world to witness to God's gracious and merciful love when he recalls John's opening verses. For this I was born, to testify to the truth, and I would add, so that we might live in the truth. We ask, with Pilate, 'what is truth?'

Truth is peace, truth is hope, truth is that through Jesus, life came into being, and that the life was the light of all people. Truth is that life which shines in the darkness and that darkness did not overcome it.

How will we let that truth live out in our lives?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.