**Sermon Christ the King**

**2 Samuel 23:1-7, -s 132:1-12 (13-18), Revelations 1:4b-8, John 18:33 -33.**

I often think about Carols this time of year, Advent draws near and I begin to think of the Carols that speak to me most. O Holy Night is one hymn that stirs my soul. My family seem to have other suggestions for me but this is one of my favourites.

But what does Christ the King have to do with Carols? An odd connection but we will come to that later. Christ the King has not always been celebrated. It’s a relatively new feast. After the second world war, Pope Pius the XI noted that although the hostilities had ended, believed there was no true peace. He lamented the rise in class division and the growth in nationalism and believed that true peace could only be found in Christ as the ‘Prince of Peace’. And so the first Feast of Christ the King was celebrated in 1925. It was then adopted by Anglicans, Lutherans and many other protestants and we find it listed in the Revised Common Lectionary. Today also marks for us the end of the church year.

The title of ‘Christ’ and ‘King’ are not used together in the gospels but ‘Christ’ is in itself a royal title. ‘Christ’ or in Greek Christos means the anointed one. In the Greek text of the scriptures, Christ is identified as the βασιλεύς or King in several instances. In Matthew Chapter 2:2, the men who came to bring gifts to Jesus asked, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?’ In our gospel reading today, Pilate infers that the title Christ is a royal title by inquiring specifically if Jesus claims to be the ‘King of the Jews’. And in John Ch. 1:49, when Jesus says to Nathaniel, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’, Nathaniel responds to Jesus saying, ‘Rabbi… You are the King (βασιλεύς) of Israel. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, Jesus is called ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords’ (1 Timothy 6:14-15).

So for us today, Christ is not a King in the sense of an earthly ruler. In our gospel today we discover that Jesus tells Pilate that his ‘kingdom is not of this world’. And if that were so, his disciples would be fighting to keep him from being handed over to Pilate’. So what are the kingdoms of this world like? One only has to look through history to discover that the kingdoms of this world strive for dominance, to have prominence. Wars, skirmishes, take overs. These are the characteristics of Kings, of rulers. Jesus made it quite clear that his kingdom did not have the characteristics of earthly kingdoms. The Roman Empire at the time took great wealth from the lands they conquered. The massive size of the military were able to keep an uneasy peace throughout the empire. And it was not long that the Romans would destroy Jerusalem.

Pilate would have understood exactly what Jesus was getting at by saying his Kingdom was not of this world. Jesus kingdom was to be based on love of God and love for one another. To show mercy, and compassion for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lame, and to show that God’s way, is not the way of the world.

If we go back to the beginning of Chapter 18 of John, we find Jesus in a garden in the Kidron Valley with his disciples. Jesus is met by Judas who has with him a detachment of soldiers as well as police, chief priests and Pharisees. Jesus, knowing they were looking for him, presents himself to them and asks, ‘For whom are you looking?’ and upon answering ‘Jesus of Nazareth’, Jesus replies saying, ‘I am he’. When they hear Jesus, they step back and fall to the ground.

I began today by saying that my favourite Carol is ‘O Holy Night’ and for good reason. The Chorus which I am sure most of us are familiar with begins, *Fall on your knees.* Those seeking Jesus to take him into custody fell to the ground. Many people throughout the gospels also fall to their knees upon asking Jesus to heal them, or to heal someone else. Even Mary, Martha and Lazarus sister, knelt before Jesus feet, taking costly perfume anoints Jesus feet.

We sing this Carol on Christmas eve to celebrate the birth of Christ singing

*Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices*

*Oh Night Divine Oh night when Christ was born.*

*Oh night divine, Oh night divine.*

*Fall on your knees*. Mary, Jesus mother, may well have fallen to her knees upon hearing the Angel Gabriel’s pronouncement that she would bear a son to be named Jesus, and that he would be called the Son of the Most High, and that the Lord God would give to him the throne of David his father and he would rule over the house of Jacob forever and his *kingdom* would have no end (Luke 1:26-33). Angels in the bible often provoked fear.

*Fall on your knees*. In Matthew’s gospel, at the foot of the cross, a Centurion and those with him who were watching over Jesus saw an earthquake and were terrified. I imagine they too fell to their knees.

*Fall on your knees*. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Philippian church, encouraged them to look not to their own interests but to the interests of others, to be of the same mind that was in Christ Jesus,

‘who though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave

being born in human likeness

and being found in human form,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death-

even death on a cross

Therefore God highly exalted him

And gave him the name

That is above every name

So that at the name of Jesus

Every knee should bend

In heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess

That Jesus Christ is Lord

To the Glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:4-11)

Jesus is for us Christ the King, but not as earthly Kings rule, but one who humbled himself, became human for us, and took the path to the Cross. We celebrate today, marking the last Sunday of our Church year, so that when return next Sunday we enter a time of waiting, a time of Advent, toward the great celebration of the birth of Christ.

May we together proclaim Christ as King in our lives, in our worship and as we go out into the world today. Amen.