

Stir up Sunday: Christ the King Year A 2011

Ezekiel 24:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 95:1-7
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

Stir up Sunday

Messy lives. The mess of holiness.

Recently I've sat with people burdened with guilt, people beginning to realise that they may be depressed, people who are recovering from illness, people who have been in and out of hospital, people who are out of work, people who have endured more hardship in life than I would wish to endure. I've witnessed dignified behaviour from people at their most exposed, most vulnerable, weakest. Regal, king-like.

Is this the kingship of Christ the King? If so, it involves being at the mercy of, and accepting, events that happen. Being passive: the passion. It involves rising above death and desolation to start again. Resurrection and ascension. Being an inspiration to others.

This is not comfortable. It is very stirring up. But the gospel readings of the last few weeks have not been comfortable. All of them have spoken of judgment, of exclusion, of condemnation for those who are late, or lazy, or easily satisfied, or who—as today—do things for the wrong reasons.

How does this sit with a faith of being comfortable, complacent, toy services, pet services? The C of I is often assumed to be a church for the respectable. How does it sit with a society that considers granting new identities to released murderers? How does it sit with the oft-heard slogan 'Jesus-loves-me' uttered by the seemingly self-satisfied, implying that the vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

The gospel readings talk of the Kingdom of God, the central theme of Jesus' message.

The Kingdom of God is not about heaven, not about an afterlife, but is life on earth. As the Lord's Prayer reminds us: Your kingdom come, on earth. It's our job to make the kingdom on earth.

Though it is something great; the kingdom begins as something small.

- It is like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, that grows into a huge plant (Mark 4:30-32)
- Moreover, mustard is a weed; once it gets started, it spreads out of control. The kingdom is like a seed growing secretly in the earth (Mark 4:26-29), like leaven spreading through flour.
- It is like a sower sowing seed (Mark 4:1-9); and Jesus is sowing the seeds of the kingdom.

The kingdom is of great value.

- In the parables of the treasure hidden in a field and the pearl of great value, characters sell all they have for the sake of the treasure, the great pearl (Mat 13:44-46).
- They suggest that the kingdom is like that, and that it involves letting go of everything. Shedding attachments, things that bind and limit us.
- It involves leaving the land of the dead, not looking back (Luke 9:59-61).

It is like a wedding banquet

- that includes the marginalized and excludes the complacent (Luke 14:16-24).
- It is marked by joy that "the lost are being found" (the three parables in Luke 15:3-32).

The Kingdom includes children, who were "nobodies" in that world. Children: risks, listen, experiment, uncynical. It excludes the pompous jobsworths. The Kingdom stands in judgment of the elites, who create and shape domination systems in their own interest (Mark 12:1-12).

When Christ the King, on trial for his life, said his kingdom was not of this world, he was NOT saying that his kingdom was of the afterlife, but was telling Pilate that his kingdom was an inner kingdom—a kingdom of outlook, of attitude, of motive—that powers our Godly action here and now. A recognition that the trappings of the material world are part of the layers we surround ourselves with in order to make ourselves look big. Spiritual anabolic steroids. Illusion. It certainly is not like any king or kingdom this world has yet known.

You can recognise the people who feel at home in the Kingdom, they are the ones who are ready to forgive. They are the people who feed and give drink to the hungry and thirsty, who welcome outcasts back into society, who clothe the naked and visit the sick and imprisoned. They, in short, free people from their pasts, and give them hope for the future. They liberate others from their burdens. This is what Jesus did.

Conquering kings their titles take from the foes they captive make: Jesus, by a nobler deed, from the thousands he hath freed.

We honour the King

- when we grow up, and take responsibility for ourselves.
- when we forgive others and let go of resentments.
- when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, when we welcome a stranger, clothe the naked and visit the prisoner. Hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, imprisoned—all parts of ourselves.
- when we realise that the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, are all parts of us that we have lost contact with—parts of ourselves that are strangers to us.
- when we do all we can to enable those around us to live with delight.

We do this to refresh and re-empower ourselves in order to do what we say we will do at the end of the Eucharist—and I assume that we mean what we say—that we go in peace to love and serve the Lord, to bring about his kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom is about a better way here on earth. Now, not then. It comes by all of us being generous and gracious.

If Jesus Christ were to have heard this I hope he might say to me:

- Well Stan I've heard your sermon and it was quite good in an unsophisticated sort of way. But will you join me in my program?
- I might say: I'm not sure I have the courage, but I've tried to describe it in such a way as not to falsify your message to suit my own stupidity. Is that enough?
- No Stan, it is not. He'd reply.

Which of us will have the courage to stand with the oppressed, the deprived, the lonely, the destitute, the tortured. We must bash on, not losing heart. This is very difficult amidst the slings and arrows ...

Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnation of love, whose suffering, death and resurrection transforms us, grant us courage to keep our eyes on your example to bring about the kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.