

Feast of Christ the King

The church's year has come full circle and what a year it's been, with all sorts of changes and challenges!

We began last Advent by preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus, both at his Incarnation at Christmas and at the 2nd coming.

Shortly after Christmas, Fr John announced that he would be retiring so, at the end of February, the Parish went into vacancy for the first time in more than 25 years!

Less than a month later, we found ourselves in national lockdown as a consequence of a global pandemic!

The decision by the Government that all church buildings should be closed for several months was a painful and difficult time for us all but, through the Gospel readings Sunday by Sunday, we have once again walked with Jesus through his life and ministry, death and resurrection. We have watched and seen how the motley group of men and women whom he called to follow him were transformed, as they grew in understanding of Jesus' identity and the purpose he came to fulfil, and to recognise him as Lord and Saviour.

With this backdrop, today we come to celebrate the Feast of Christ the King and to ask the question, what do we mean when we speak of Christ the King? Jesus was certainly a king, but he didn't have the kind of earthly power by which men in his own days and, indeed, in ours set such great store.

Jesus' kingdom, the Kingdom of God, is not a geographical kingdom, based on human ideas of power and authority, but is to be found wherever Jesus reigns in glory in the hearts, minds and actions of those who follow him. All thoughts and ideas, all creation, all love, all hope, all existence. Jesus' kingdom, the Kingdom of God, also has an eternal dimension, because it is nothing less than the beginning and end of everything: God not only always has been, but is now and always will be.

God's kingdom, then, is not of this world, but it is not outside it either. God's Kingdom can be seen wherever love and joy and peace reign; wherever we see forgiveness and patience, hope and healing. Wherever these qualities are present, whether in individuals or in communities, we are seeing signs of God's kingdom here on earth, which will ultimately be fulfilled in heaven.

To put it another way, Jesus' kingdom territory is to be found wherever men and women have invited him into their lives. What Jesus shows us is that we don't have to be young, beautiful, intelligent, powerful etc but, when we allow Jesus to reign in our hearts, we begin to allow him a space in which he can work to transform us for the better, as he did the first disciples. As we keep close to him, gradually, over time, we will grow wiser and more loving, eventually becoming more willing to forgive, wanting to reach out to others with the love and compassion which Christ has shown us.

During this year of Covid, it has been impressive to see, up and down the country and on the Isle of Wight, how many people have got engaged with all sorts of projects to provide help and support for the most vulnerable in our society. It is good to notice that Christians of all denominations have been actively involved in these initiatives, showing Christian love and compassion to their neighbours in line with the two great commandments: "love God and love your neighbour as yourself".

Whoever we are, each and every one of us has a part to play in God's kingdom purposes for his world. On this last Sunday of the Christian Year, we are summing up everything we know about Jesus, and what the implications of this are for our discipleship.

As we come to the end of this church year, let us ask ourselves two questions. Firstly, "how have I responded to the challenges which have come my way this year?" and, secondly, "Is Christ more King of my life today than he was a year ago?"

However we answer these questions, today is the day to recommit ourselves to trusting our servant king more, through whatever the next year holds for us. It is also the day to recommit to following him more closely, so that we can each play our part in making his Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven.