**Sermon – Sunday 22nd November 2020 – Christ the King**

**May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Today we celebrate the kingship of Christ in the feast of Christ the King, the last major festival within the church’s year.

Next Sunday is Advent Sunday which marks both the start of our preparations for Christmas and the Incarnation, but also the new church year, but more on that next Sunday.

Our focus this Sunday is on the kingship of Christ, and how Jesus Christ should be central in our lives and that we should seek to live in accordance with his teachings and example.

We may think that we know what is expected of us and it is all very straightforward:-

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength and you shall love your neighbour as yourself”

However we know that life is not that simple and stuff happens and we, by our human nature, will fall short of what is demanded of us and other things can become more important in our lives to the detriment of our faith.

The challenge that we all face is how we continue to live out our Christian faith when we are faced with demands and challenges, when what we would call the mess of everyday life gets in the way and thinking about the place of Jesus in our life is low on our list of priorities.

This sense of priority and following the commands of Jesus is highlighted in the Gospel reading from Matthew that we have just heard.

Jesus is looking ahead to the time when he will return in glory and people will be asked to account for their actions.

The concept of judgement is something that is not always talked about or thought about when we think about God and the end of time.

And yet is it a central part of our faith and as we affirm in the Creed:-

“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

The reading from Matthew is one of my favourite Gospel passages as it is very clear and unambiguous as to what we should do.

In the parable we are given clear commands as to what we are to do:-

* Feed the hungry
* Give water to the thirsty
* Welcome the stranger
* Cloth the naked
* Care for the sick
* Visit the prisoner

And we are to undertake these actions as if we were ministering to Jesus himself.

Thus we should not think about whether the person we are asked to serve is worthy of our help or whether they will be able to reward us in some way, we are to think of them as Jesus.

I would hope that we would all agree that if Jesus appeared in front of us in need of our help, we would help him.

I have used this example before when thinking about this – if you have ever watched a TV show called Undercover Boss or seen a clip on Youtube when someone pretends to be someone they are not to see how people react.

When the person reveals themselves in their true identity often the reaction of the employee for example is one of shock and profuse apologies if they have done something wrong or not shown their company in a good light particularly in front of the boss.

Thus it is clear from the excuses that those on Jesus’ left hand give that had they known that they were meeting the needs of Jesus himself, of course they would have given him a drink, or food, or shelter or clothing.

However it is clear that they would have done this on the premise and expectation of a reward.

As we heard in the passage, the sheep on Jesus’ right hand will be rewarded with eternal life, whilst the goats on his left hand will be subject to eternal damnation.

And this judgement will be based on our reaction to human need – the needs of those we see around us.

Our help does not need to be spectacular or involve vast amounts of money – it is the simple things that actually make the greatest difference – a cup of water, visiting the sick.

Equally, as I highlighted earlier, it should not be done on a calculated basis i.e. if I do this I will be OK when the time of judgement comes.

This is pandering to our own self-esteem.

No, it should be done out of love, unprompted and done for nothing but for the sake of helping.

Jesus says such help is given to him and the way to please God the Father, is to help his children.

To refuse to give help is to refuse to help Christ himself.

And our first reading from the prophet Ezekiel is also a reminder of the judgement of God.

The passage speaks of God searching out for his sheep and caring for them but also judging the “fat sheep” who had kept the pastures for themselves and pushed away the hungry and needy.

And thus those listening to Jesus’ parable would have identified with the sheep and the goats and the justice handed out to the goats.

No-one could say that they had not been warned.

So, what about us?

We know exactly what is required of us and we can see the hungry, the thirsty, the estranged, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned all around us, both locally but globally as we watch the TV or read the newspapers and never more so at the moment as the pandemic continues to sweep the globe.

And we are aware that there are consequences as to how we live, both now but at the time of judgement.

One of the observations that is sometimes made about this passage is that it does not make any reference to worship of God – it speaks of how we should help people and thus help Christ.

But this misses the point – for our worship on a Sunday or at any other time for that matter – to be genuine and authentic it should make a difference to what we do and how we live.

Our worship should not just be a box we tick each week to say “Done church this week”, now for the shopping or whatever.

It should make a difference and our worship should continue even if, like now, we cannot physically come into the Church building. We cannot just say, that as we cannot physically gather together we don’t worship or continue praying.

If we truly worship Christ the King, as our king, this demands a change to how we live and what we do.

We need to ensure that as individuals and as a faith community we do follow the commands of Christ and to help those we meet in need or enable others to support those in need in other parts of the world.

During this present time of global crisis there are plenty of opportunities to help locally and nationally and I am sure that each of you has helped as you are able.

Here in Downham we make a contribution by helping support the local Food Project which provides much more than food and we have seen the numbers treble during this time.

And as individuals I am sure that you make your own contributions to various charities or causes and this should be between yourself and God and done out of a genuine desire to help in keeping with the message of the Gospel.

We are called to be Christ’s body here on earth and as such we know that we are called to follow the commands of our King and Saviour and to work to bring life out of the death that we see around us, following the example of our redeeming Lord.

Today we recognise and celebrate the kingship of Christ, acknowledge our own short-comings and failings and commit to serving Christ out of love for him and our fellow men and women.

*Christ my King, as I worship you for your great glory, give me grace to honour all people for your sake. Make me a channel of your love, open my eyes to see your image in men and women around me, guide me to use my opportunities for compassion and to neglect none of your children who cry to you.*

*Amen.*