

Christ the King 2020
Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24
Psalm 100
Ephesians 1.15-23
Matthew 25.31-46.

My wife Lynn and I have two children - they are not children anymore, they are well and truly grown up, but when our children were young, and we were on a long car trip one of the things we did to help keep things under control in the back seat was to play children's songs on the car sound system.

The children had a number of favourites some of which we all sang along with. Among the children's songs were some Christian songs. Songs for children with a Christian message. And again, the kids had some they really liked.

Lynn and I had one which we particularly liked. I can still remember the first couple of lines of our favourite - o.b.e.y obey your mum and dad, o.b.e.y it makes them very glad. That was a great message as far as we were concerned. Every now and again when we are together as a family these days, we reminisce about those days of the long car trips, and the o.b.e.y song always comes up (usually raised by Lynn or I) and our kids, though they are not kids any more, react with a groan. The notion of obedience is a bit like that for most of us. We don't tend to view it very positively - unless we are the ones being obeyed of course - then it's great!

And yet there are times when to obey is reasonable and logical and positive. For instance, I might not like to stop at red lights at intersections but to obey the signal is likely to save my life or someone else's.

Or I may have never gone sailing in my life but when the skipper of the boat tells me to get my head down when the boat changes tack it's logical to obey because the skipper has much more knowledge than I do about the consequences of a swinging boom. The skipper of the boat is worthy of obedience.

Sunday November 22 is the feast of the Reign of Christ the King. In this feast we especially celebrate the fact that Christ is King. This feast was begun in 1925 by Pope Pius the eleventh in response to growing secularism after World War 1, and political tension between the Vatican and the republic of Italy. Whatever the reasons behind the origins of this feast day it has been widely adopted across the Christian church and is celebrated by the Roman Catholic, Anglican and many Protestant churches.

Christ the King is an important festival because it reminds us that in fact, contrary to what seem to be the case, Christ is King because God has made him king to reign over all creation.

Another of today's set readings from Ephesians chapter 1 makes that very clear when in verse 20 we read, "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and

power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come”.

We may not see Jesus reign completely yet. It is the case that some accept him and recognise him, about one third of the world’s population, but clearly many do not yet, but whether everyone recognises him or not, Jesus is king, he is Lord, and we who do accept him, seek to treat him as King, as Lord, and do what we can to help other people to accept him as king too.

The Gospel reading for Christ the King this year is from Matthew 25: 31-46. This passage is part of a block of teaching in Matthew’s gospel about living in the time between Jesus’ first coming and his second coming, in other words, now.

Today’s gospel reading follows the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids and the parable of the talents. Both of those talk about how to live as we await the return of Jesus. The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids says be ready, be prepared, continue to be ready for Jesus return, and the parable of the talents says as we wait for Jesus return, we must use the gifts and opportunities we have been given in a way that serves Jesus and continues his ministry so more people know him and recognise him as Lord. In each case there is an element of judgement when Jesus returns for those who have acted the way they should.

Today’s gospel continues the theme of how disciples of Jesus live as we wait for Jesus second coming.

The gospel for today doesn’t end with judgement as those earlier two parables do, it starts with judgement - the division of people, some to the right hand of the king and some to the left. Some to reward and some to punishment. The basis of the judgement is treatment of Jesus.

So, for instance: “I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you gave me clothing, I was sick, and you took of me, I was in prison and you visited me”. And then the question, “Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and thirsty, a stranger or naked or sick or in prison?” And then the crunch answer: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”.

It’s very easy to call Jesus Lord or King or God. It’s one thing to worship him and pray to him or in his name. To treat Jesus in those ways is one thing. But in this passage Jesus highlights that the way to show him love and respect and worship is to care for the least of people, the neediest of people, the least powerful people. Jesus draws a clear line between the treatment of those people and himself. To show them love is to show him love. To treat them with respect is to treat him with respect. To show that they are worthy and valuable is to show that Jesus is worthy and valuable.

This passage continues the teaching on how to live as disciples of Jesus as we wait for his coming again, and the answer in this passage is to worship Jesus, to show love and care for

Jesus. To demonstrate his worth as our king, and how do we do that? By showing love and care for the least of people. In that, we do it to and for Christ.