**Sunday 20th November 2022**

**The Reign of Christ the King Sunday.**

**Colossians 1:11-20 and Luke 23:33-43**

**What does the reign of Christ as King look like?**

This Sunday marks the end of one Liturgical year, before Advent takes over, and the cycle begins again with a new Gospel focus. This last year we have been journeying with Luke, the Physician, as he has taken us through his understanding of the importance of Jesus of Nazareth, who he was, what he taught and what this means for our life today as His followers, or disciples.

Next Sunday is Advent 1 – four Sundays until Christmas – and Anne will be introducing us to the Apostle Matthew and his understanding of who Jesus was, what Jesus taught and what significance and impact this has on us and our world.

On this Christ the King Sunday, we are reminded again that Christ’s kingship does not shy away from the agony of the cross, the vulnerability of the incarnation, the risk and betrayal of human relationships in times of danger and threat. The King whom we worship, the one we call Lord and the Son of God, is the one who knows the troubles and frailties of human life.

We didn’t read from the Prophet Jeremiah or Psalm 46 today but both look forward to the Reign of a branch of the Kingly line of David – to one who will eventually resume the Throne of Israel. Few details are known about this person and the description of this King is quite vague but the hallmarks of his “kingship” are very clear. They are wisdom, justice and righteousness.

Luke picks up on these hallmarks from the Prophet Jeremiah.

In Luke’s Gospel Jesus is portrayed as falling foul of both the Jewish and Roman authorities. (Luke 23:1-5). He is accused of being both a false prophet and a stirrer of civil unrest. Jesus’ death is also, particularly in Luke’s Gospel, presented as part of God’s purpose for salvation (Luke 18: 31-33). Only in this Gospel does Jesus forgive those who crucify him (v34) and only here does he extend the promise of a place in paradise to the “good” thief, who seems to recognise there is something different about Jesus as they hang together on their crosses. (v41) The thief senses that this man has power to make things different for him after their deaths. In Jesus’ Kingdom, salvation is offered to all who seek it. The cross is the throne of Christ who challenges all that earthly authority represents, and which the resurrection vindicates.

I am also struck by the reference in the Letter to the Colossians that Christ is “the image of the invisible God.” Here Paul strongly affirms that what took place in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the work of God. Listen to these words from The Message.

**13-14**God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He’s set us up in the kingdom of the Son he loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit we were in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating.

**15-18**We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—*everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

**18-20**He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he’s there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so expansive, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

As you can, I hope, see this Kingdom of God and Reign of Christ is so different to anything we have ever experienced in our human form of Kingship, Government and rule.

Lately, I have been reading Philip Short’s massive book (around 900 pages) titled *Putin – his life and times.* Having read before that, two volumes by Volker Ullrich on Hitler’s Ascendancy and his Downfall, it struck me just how much the two men have characteristics and traits that we find in many political leaders. Hitler modelled himself on Bismarck and Putin models himself on the Tsars and Stalin. Both were, and are, concerned with control of the people and power. Both view people as pawns to be used by them for their own ends. Political control means absolute political control, for as Putin says, Russia and the Soviet Union have known nothing but strong political leaders who tell the people what to do, how to do it and brook no opposition. To challenge the leaders is to challenge the state.

That is how it was when Kings ruled with divine authority. Rule in these examples is not about the good of the people or the welfare of the people. It is about authoritarian power and domination.

These are the ones who crucified Christ Jesus. Luke said “They crucified him: the religious and political rulers, the soldiers, and the bystanders. Including disciples.” They means us for today we still crucify Jesus when we choose not to follow the values of His Kingdom and his way of truth and life.

The same forces that took Jesus to the Cross and his death are still at work in the world today.

Last Sunday evening, the Sunday programme on TV1 had an insightful analysis of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) and the claimed financial corruption and tax evasion within that organisation. Other churches here in New Zealand and in Australia have also been accused of abuse by members.

As we look at our world and society, we find religious and political authorities ruling over millions of people; economic and financial powers dividing among themselves the riches of the earth, robbing from the people; military and terrorist wars destroying human lives; and people who have become simply ‘watchers’ of what is going on in the world. Just as it was in the story of the crucifixion long ago. The suffering ones not mentioned in the story of the crucifixion are the children; yet today it is often the children who suffer and are abused by the wealthy as the children work in mines digging minerals and sweat shops making clothes. And who reaps the benefits – mainly the people of the wealthy nations of the world -those with economic, political and military power.

What we do to others we do to God and what we do to God’s creation we do to God the Creator. If Christ is truly to reign in our lives, as Lord and King, then we have to take a good hard look at this dynamic.

As wisdom, justice and righteousness are the hallmarks of Christ’s reign are we able to allows these to also be the hallmarks of those of us who seek to follow him in this very complex and divided world in which we live?

To God be the glory. Amen