Sunday 24th November 2019

Christ the King Colossians 1: 9-20; Luke 23:33-43

Prayer: Almighty God - Take my words and speak through them, take our ears and hear through them, take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. Amen

I wonder if 160 years ago when the land owners decided that a church was needed for the benefit of the 400 village residents of Higher Bebington whether there was a lot of debate as to what the church should be called. There normally is! Should it be named after a saint? And if so which one? Or what?

The name Christ Church wasn’t as common then as it appears to us now. Christ Church Birkenhead had opened 10 years previously but it would be another 45 years before Christ Church Post Sunlight was built and Christ Church Barnston was also later somewhere around 1870.

I like to think that they wanted to call it Christ Church because they wanted to keep Christ prominent. Admittedly you can’t have a church without Christ but sometimes it can be easy to act as if we we’ve forgotten its actually Christ’s Church. We can get so involved in activities, even good ones, that we lose the focus of why we are doing them and that we should be doing them with Christ, in his name and his power.

I was a little hesitant about using the thoughts I selected for this week as they are pretty hard-hitting and this is a celebration day - but it’s good to be challenged! After 160 years it wouldn’t be surprising for a church to lose its focus and initial vision and enthusiasm. Instead of being the body of Christ – fully connected with the head – it can readily function just as any other community or club. And so the challenge for us today is - is this really the church of Christ, or are we just calling it the church because of our traditions and history? What makes us distinctive? If it really is Jesus Christ - what is so different about Christ that today we still want to worship him, follow him, give our lives to him and live like he did?

Today we celebrate Christ the King – the ultimate picture of Christ supremely exalted, above all, before we once again prepare for his coming and his incarnation in Advent.

Our readings couldn’t be more contrasting; while both are pictures of Christ the King one is filled with disdain, utter humiliation and mockery whereas the other – written just a few years later - is an astonishing declaration of who they came to realise and proclaim this crucified king of the Jews really is. He is none other than God himself, the creator and sustainer of the whole world, before all things, above all things, preeminent in everything. No one less than the Almighty God himself who came and lived amongus so that somehow through his awful death we could come into relationship with the Creator and Sustainer God being accepted, forgiven and loved.

We struggle to understand how such a one who was so filled with love could have ended up being have crucified along with the criminals, hated and despised. Surely if Jesus was the supreme God as the apostle Paul described - why couldn’t he avoid this desperate situation? Surely he could have come down from the cross as those taunting suggested and demonstrate his awesome creative power and claim an earthly kingship? But there was something far deeper going on here.

Amazingly one of the criminals being crucified alongside Jesus grasped something of it and who Jesus was. I wonder if had he heard Jesus preaching on the kingdom of God – a Kingdom much greater and beyond than anything this world knows? Or was he moved by the words of forgiveness that Jesus had offered to the crowd?

Although he was dying in agony a death he knew he deserved, he acknowledged that Jesus was totally innocent. Perhaps he saw a dignity about Jesus despite all the pain and the taunting. And so he calls out, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He wasn’t asking to be there; there wouldn’t be a place in God’s kingdom for one who had done such wrong! All he wanted was to be remembered but would Jesus ignore him with so much else going on?

Despite all Jesus was going through I’m sure Jesus’ reply overwhelmed him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’ He, a convicted criminal, would be with the King of Kings and Lord of lords – participating in his kingdom! That was unimaginable but that’s what God’s kingdom is like - totally inclusive regardless of lifestyle.

God’s kingdom isn’t designed for everyone who thinks a lot of themselves and consider themselves good and better than others – but it’s for those who recognise their need, their inability to do things right and who come humbly seeking God’s forgiveness and power. And as Paul wrote, they – and us - are - rescued from the dominion of darkness, that dark, hopeless place where self dominates, and brought into the kingdom of the Son, where we are accepted and forgiven. This is a kingdom of light, of love, of Christ! This is the church – comprising not particularly good people but forgiven people! People who have experienced God’s abundant love and forgiveness and have refocused their lives to follow and become like King Jesus demonstrating his love and forgiveness to others too.

Paul didn’t just write about the pre-eminence of Jesus – he wanted them to experience it in everyday life. And so he prayed for them. He continually asked that they would know God’s will and live lives worthy of Jesus, pleasing him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God and being strengthened with His power. Surely that should be our prayer as we look forward to another hundred years or so of being Christ in this Parish. Amen

Rev E Blackmore