

All Saints Marseille  
Sermon of Rev Malcolm DODD

26<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Our theme for today is Christ the King, but one has to look at the history and background of the Old Testament kings and their dealings with men to perceive the creative newness that Jesus brought. The kings in the Old Testament range from Pharaohs, who governed with a powerful rule and army through Nebuchadnezzar who came down from the North of the Holy Land and conquered in a devastating way, removed the population off to Babylon and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, leaving the Jews devastated.

To put it simply, the ancient history was of kings ruling by power and taking over countries and land through force. Devastating history and unpleasant. And then another king appeared on the horizon: Cyrus the Great. Mentioned over 30 times in the Bible, Cyrus suddenly appeared and overthrew almost all the previous kings and their way of ruling. He invited those who were conquered not only to become citizens of Babylon but also to take a full and important part in the ruling of the country, spreading a system of openness and peace in his kingdom. For those who chose not to move from their homelands he gave a lot of freedom to live in peace, under subservient officials who ensured both peace and a good way of political life.

During all this time there was a theme in the Old Testament Jewish tradition that a Messiah would come to lead the Jews out of slavery, into a new kingdom of peace where God could be worshipped without fear. Given the political situation of their history, each new conqueror was seen as a hope for the betterment of the Jewish future, but in reality this did not happen; the conquerors were just as warlike as their predecessors!

There were however particular examples of the underlying divine truths about those kings. An example of this was when Moses said to Pharaoh "let my people go," and Pharaoh, not being happy about this, found to his cost that Passover was rather less pleasant! The clash between military power and the deeper truth of the divine right to worship in freedom led to the exodus. All through this history there remained the idea that a king would come and demonstrate God's ways of justice and peace, and free the people of Israel. When Jesus was born, one of the first happenings was the flight away from Herod the King; confrontation was not an option - the rule of both Herod and the Roman occupation was far too powerful to be overthrown by a small force.

However, as Jesus's life developed there were a number of recorded instances where the divine broke through the normal. In the Temple as a young man his response to a challenge was "do you not know I must be about my father's business?" The parables where he challenged the status quo of the Pharisees; the healings that he carried out, that offended the status quo with respect to the sanctity of the Sabbath; the confrontation with those who had done wrong. He also pointed out that there is much joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents rather than keeping to the letter of the law.

We also see that acting in any way to bring about a higher quality of life is following in the way that leads to life...visiting those in prison, giving support to the hungry, supporting the weak, welcoming strangers all are marks of true kingship. It is perhaps a note for our time that the poor seem to get poorer, that nowadays there seems to be more need to be helping refugees, and I suppose the old adage that "where there is no vision the people perish" could easily be applied to many kings, rulers and politicians in our own time. Only this week the scene in Zimbabwe echoes these thoughts.

Our readings point to Jesus as King, not because of the use of armies and force, but rather the seeking out of the lost, the bringing of new hope to those without hope, the shepherding of the flock with justice, the strengthening of the weak... all these are the signs of Christ as King. In his life Jesus showed what life lived in the consciousness of the divine could be, a wonderfully fulfilling experience. He shared this with the disciples and those whose lives he touched, or changed for the better.

In these ways Christ showed that he was truly the King of humanity, and demonstrated what real kingship is about. Sense of the divine fulfilment of the Old Testament. His kingship was a life lived in the

understanding and continual discovery of the divine in the ordinariness of human life; a life lived to the utmost, and above all a life that demonstrated God alive in human life. More than that, it showed what real kingship was about. When we look at the model of kingship in our world today we get a complete mixture: from our own Queen who exerts virtually no power in the nation politically; leaders who like to think of themselves as kings or queens and lord it over their people, very often making lives worse and poorer. And recently the events in Zimbabwe show what can happen when tyrants try to be kings!

It is in the Messiah and his life that God saves us and brings us closer to himself. Thus, in the death of the Messiah sin is wholly and finally exposed, and the righteousness of God is achieved in the concrete obedience of his son, truly crowned King; perhaps the greatest kingship of all is in these words.

However the service of God no longer means 'doing' (obeying laws and commandments), but in bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit; the struggle through whatever conflicts looking forward to the final unveiling of the Messiah's glory. And that is precisely what Jesus did. He brought forth the fruit of the spirit of God in his life. The works of the ancient laws were superseded by this new way of kingship. And to follow that up the promise of Jesus: Father those whom thou hast given me, I will that they may also be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me...The true Christ risen and seen as King in Glory.

May our preparations and Celebrations for this Christmas carry with them the glory of being Christian, and finding the love of God still alive in the whole world around us.