

It's the last Sunday of the liturgical year and today is the celebration of Christ the King.

That's all well and good but most people are not that familiar with what this really is and what we do with it.

It was instituted in 1925 by the Pope and only brought into Anglican worship when the revised common lectionary was adopted...so if you feel as if you have no idea what this Sunday is supposed to be – you're in good company.

Today is also the last day of our series on Peter and the readings we have had bring both things together. Colossians – the supremacy of the Son of God and in Acts we read of Peter being just like Jesus, healing the sick and raising the dead. The clue to how we celebrate the Sunday of Christ the King is right there.

Bishop Stephen calls us to be a Christlike church. What was Christ like? He healed the sick. He raised the dead. He fed the hungry. He reached out to the outcasts and the poor. He was constantly being seen with the wrong people in the wrong place. Friend of tax-collectors, prostitutes and sinners. I genuinely think that when I see the church of England holding a great ceremony with robes and processions and all the rest of it, Jesus would be round the back with the Cathedral staff.

And what do we observe in the Apostle Peter after his amazing journey from Galilean fisherman to head of the church? He healed the sick, he raised the dead and as Rogan reminded us last week, he was most definitely out of his comfort zone being seen with people he had previously shunned. The main difference – Jesus

proclaimed the kingdom of God was near, and Peter preached Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord. The kingdom of God was now reality for those who accept Christ as King.

What kind of King is Jesus Christ?

I'm currently listening to an audio-book by C.J.Sansom called Sovereign. The central character is a barrister from Lincolns Inn who gets embroiled in murder and mystery and the author brilliantly weaves his story around real historical events. In this book King Henry the VIII makes A Progress to York to hear the grovelling apology of the northerners who had rebelled against the crown. In kneeling before him they had to refer to Henry as "your dread majesty".

Is that your image of Jesus Christ as King? Is he the "dread majesty" who holds over you the gift of eternal life or eternal damnation? Serve and love me otherwise hell awaits??? I don't think so.

What kind of king is Jesus?

He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he reached out to outcast and poor. Oh Yes, and he was crucified for our sins.

Perhaps another familiar King points the way. Advent begins next week and I'm sure at some point we shall sing a familiar carol – Good King Wenceslas.

Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the feast of Stephen, when the snow lay round about (*see if you can complete the verse*)

He was a real person, his name was Vaclav (Vaht-Slaf) and his kingdom was Bohemia about 2/3rds the present Czech republic. He

was a committed Christian at a time of widespread pagan beliefs and he had a genuine compassion for the poor. He was well known for his mercy and generosity.

He was murdered by his brother Bolesaw and inevitably the stories and legends grew up around such a well-loved king. Later the Catholic church made him a saint. Quite whether or not the ground became warm where he walked (as it says in the carol) I cannot say, but it was entirely consistent that this kind King would take food and logs to the poor on the feast of Stephen – boxing day.

King Wenceslas lived a Christlike life and so can we.

What we have discovered in looking at the life of Peter is that if HE can follow in Christ's steps and if HE can come through the most horrendous failures and disappointments then so can we. I'm not going to be made head of the church and none of us will be crowned King or Queen, our lives will be lived at much humbler levels...but nevertheless, we honour Christ the King by having the same mind and attitude he did, by being Christlike.

I can only presume that when Peter healed Aeneas and raised Dorcas, he had an overwhelming inner impulse that the Holy Spirit was at work and this is what he must do. I can't say I've ever felt the same thing, but I will pray for the sick and will continue to do so. We can be generous...whether it's to collect the goods for the "Your Sanctuary" Christmas gifts, or to twin a toilet, or simply the ordinary giving to the church so that we can be a visible sign of God's Kingdom. We can be compassionate and open to people who are not like us. There should be an inner desire and question. What

would Jesus do and can I do that here too? We honour Christ the King by a commitment to a Christlike life and a Christlike church.

What kind of King is Jesus? Time for a little story.

The old King was to step aside because his son was now of age and would be coming King. To celebrate he held a vast banquet and everyone was to attend, no exceptions. To celebrate this coronation, the Father said that each and every village and town should bring his son a gift...a golden bowl.

In those places where they loved the old king and loved His son, this was a time for great excitement. Just how big a golden bowl could they manage...everyone gave what they could and then more. Huge golden bowls.

In those places where people were a little more ambiguous about how they felt, they nevertheless got down to it and made some very nice and suitable golden bowls.

In one village the people had no love for the King or His son. They argued and complained bitterly about the demands of the crown and almost came to blows with each other. One cunning soul remembered his breakfast and said – an egg cup is a bowl. This village made a golden egg cup.

At the banquet with great ceremony and pomp the Son came into his kingdom. Stepping forward he addressed all his people who gathered round holding their golden bowls. The angry village looked smugly around thinking how much they had saved themselves while still keeping the letter of the law.

The young King spoke.

To celebrate my coronation, today I am opening my treasure house.
Take your golden bowls and fill them to the brim. Heap them high
and take back with you all that you can carry. Share my happiness.

The people from the angry village looked like they had just
swallowed a wasp.

Jesus is a King we cannot out-love.

We cannot out-give.

We cannot out-serve.

Whose demands upon us turn out to be the very things that give us
life and health and peace.

He calls those, like Peter who don't know themselves and who need
a new name to get on the right track. Whatever challenge he sets, he
gives the faith and courage and strength to meet and whatever he
might ask of us, he has already given far more.

This is Christ the King.