MAKES YOU WONDER RESOURCES

CHRIST THE KING

This talk was a sermon in church on CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

**Bible Readings**

Colossians 1:11-20 the supremacy of Christ
Luke 23:33-43 King of the Jews

The last Sunday of the Christian year is called ‘Christ the King Sunday’. Since the Advent season starts off the Christian year next week, we will be talking about the infant Jesus a bit so it is a neat reminder of what we are talking about. BUT I have some problems with the title ‘Christ the King’.

It is a problem of association. The nearest we have to a king in our culture is Prince Charles.

It is a problem of relevance. ‘King’ at its best is only symbolic in a country as fiercely democratic as Australians. I think Jesus is more than a symbolic leader.

It is a problem of distance. If a king came around I know I would do and say something really dumb. I cant relate to a ‘king’ that is afar off above me. Jesus is not like that. I walk the light and dark corridors of my life with Jesus who understands my anxiety as father, understands my frustrations as a husband, and understands the thoughts and memories that I wish weren’t there in my head. Christians use the word ‘intimate’ of Jesus.

So, people have tried playing with the idea – ‘Jesus in me -resident and president’. Then there is the reverse-symbol - Jesus the Queen – nicely provocative in the country that invented Priscilla queen of the desert. Jesus the boss or MD (a business image) , the captain (sporting image);, Perry suggested Jesus ‘the big Kahuna’ – which sounds like a Hawaiian holiday.

These are all good ideas to delve into but the fact is we don’t like tall poppies or their titles at any time so the whole project to find another word may be doomed. Besides, when persons get touchy and titchy about words it is probably the sign of being chronically out of touch with each other, so let us find the word’s original meaning and go into it that way.

In the early years when being a Christian first became politically safe, the third century, these icons of the enthroned Christ emerged. The title is ‘pantocrator’ – it was stolen from the emperor-kings of the time – and means ‘pan’=universal and ‘crator’ = ‘creator or builder’. It displaced the emperor as the object of supreme loyalty. These images lasted for over a thousand years. At some points along that line it became an excuse to make the church into an imperialistic power in Europe and the Crusades, with disastrous results.

‘Pantocrator’ was not a new thought, as some rather tiresome cynics in the theological media would have us think, but simply a new medium and a new situation. Some would say that the idea of Jesus being God was a later evolution of thought in the church as it came to power, but you would have to do a monumental job of re-arranging history to come to that conclusion.

In an earlier era, Jesus was **proclaimed as Lord**. That upset the Jewish people of Jesus’ own heritage, who reserved that title for the Supreme God alone. Though enfleshed down into a six foot tall body, and sandwiched into the unfolding sequence of time, Jesus repeatedly made references to his ultimate eternal status – before Abraham was I am , I am the light of the world, whoever sees me sees the Father, i and the father are one, i am in the Father and the Father is in me. Witnesses also heard God address Jesus, saw many miracles, resurrection, and heard the loud ring of truth in his words. The acts reinforced the claims being made. That is why they say things like ‘this is what we have witnessed’ , in other words, this is what happened to us in Jesus of Nazareth, whether we can make perfect sense of it or not . The idea of Jesus being at one with God, in away that surpassed all other prophets, in a way that matched the Word of God, the creation of God, the will of God and the love of God, would have been very hard for his very Jewish disciples to swallow or even hear but they did bear witness to it in these earliest records.

The title ‘Lord’ or master also upset the Romans who had to swear allegiance to Caesar as Lord. NO, the Christians said, Jesus is Lord. In those three words you could be signing your own death certificate, or probably more frequent, your prospects for government employment or government contract just took a dive. In short, way too short, a Christian’s allegiance to Jesus as Lord was the cornerstone of their values and of their views. It was ‘axiomatic’ , Paul says to Timothy, and all other viewpoints in reasoning, and values in living, were to be seen in this light.

So this incredible fuss about ‘believing in Jesus’ is not a religious thought, join-the-club zealotry, but a daily lifestyle, an intellectual thorn and a politically charged stance. Somehow, Jesus is the gateway to something vital that should not be tamed.

From one of the earliest books of the New Testament, listen to **Colossians** celebrate the glory and supremacy of Christ:

11-12 ***Belief shapes our experience*. Good theology does not makes us wordy and weak but leads us to be strong**: be made strong for endurance, joy, thanksgiving, inheritance in the light

13-14 **Christ is a belief about our absolute significance and status, so it needs to be *understood in many ways*:** he has rescued from darkness, transferred into his kingdom, redeemed, forgiveness

15-17 **This is not just about me, and not the arrogance of a recent religion, but it the most *reliable model for the way the whole world works*:** firstborn of creation, holds all things together.

18a **This does not deliver power to prelates and priests, it does not create institutions of philosophy and tradition, it *disarms the ambitions* of the church leaders**: head of the body the church,

18b **This is *not a mere symbol* of hope, it is a promise and guarantee that *in the real world* the love of God wins and not pain:** firstborn from the dead

19 **Throughout history people have argued over god and the different religions show agreements to a considerable degree, but in Jesus there is something** ***unique and unsurpassed***: the fullness of god dwells

20a  **Based on Jesus’ own teachings, and some precursors in Judaism, indeed in every religion, *something happened* of Universal cosmic significance for all peoples and planet *(pan),*  before and after:** reconciled all things

20b **All these events have been visible , accessible in history and located in the real world, you can go to the places, with real visible life that flowed out in blood:** making peace by blood of the cross.

In one passage set for today, the peace that Jesus made by the cross is described (in one of the many ways) as the work of a king: Luke 23:32-43

There are those who have decided that jesus’ claims are a dangerous deciept:

32-33 crucified at Golgotha with criminals

There are those who treat the whole question as a lottery:

34b gambled for his clothing

There are those constant attacks suggest that there is something they need to be afraid of:

35 leaders scoff – save himself

There are those who get caught up in the mood of the day:

36-37 soldiers mocked – save yourself

38 sign: king of the jews

39 one criminal mocks – save yourself and us

But the other criminal has heard something that shows a mastery of life and death:

34a father forgive them

So he gives his dying breath to a desperate moment of truth:

40-42 fear god! Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom

And Jesus says something strange to him:

43 truly – today – you will be with me in paradise

It is about a kind of life that is bigger than death. It is about passing through the door to glory. But hidden in this phrase is a remarkably tender King. “Paradise” is not a jewish word for eternal life, the kind of phrase Jesus and Paul uses elsewhere. It is a greek or roman word for the afterlife. It would not normally be found on the lips of someone whose jewish heritage meant everything to him. It would seem this criminal was not therefore a Jewish political zealot but a common criminal, maybe a deserter. He us receiving he says the just deserts to his desperate life. But Jesus speaks to him in simple words in language that the tortured man can understand. To encourage us all, Jesus is not theologically correct at this moment of compassion and witness.

Even when his own breath doesn’t come, he is the king of peace. This is the meaning of the king of glory. This is how he triumphs over his enemies - he forgives them. This is his justice for all - He gives peace even to the no-hoper. This is not a religious story taking place in cyber space – this to the last drop of his blood is the real God for a real world. Here lives a King who loves his people and planet.

Will you re-commit today to serve this King in this sort of way with your life?