

**I pray that God will fire our imaginations and stir us into action as we look at his word this morning, Amen.**

Today is the last Sunday in the Church's year and what a year it has been. It is also the feast of Christ the King. This festival was introduced in the mid 1920's to counter the growing secularism, after the terrible devastation of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and the great depression that followed. It was seeking to get people to remember that despite the circumstances, the world had a Saviour in Jesus and he was Christ the King. So what better way to start our look at the scriptures read for us today than to reflect on Paul's prayer found in the opening of his letter to the Ephesians which he wrote from his prison in Rome which was probably intended to be circulated to encourage all the struggling churches in Asia Minor.

Paul's prayer surpasses anything else in his other letters stretching the expectation of hope and the imagination of faith. The intercession falls into 2 parts. First he asks for knowledge which is fundamental for our well being. For many, one of the problems of our current pandemic is not really knowing what lies ahead. Paul asks that God might give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they might see and know the hope to which they, like us, have been called and the riches of the glorious inheritance that we all have among the saints.

This kind of knowledge comes through the personal experience of a relationship with God, that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened, dispelling the darkness of uncertainty. Human knowledge of facts and information is not enough, it can help like knowing that the infection rate is going up or down but it's only when knowledge gains that divine spark that it becomes wisdom and we are able to understand the nature of the hope to which our loving God has called us. This calling is both an invitation and summons for all to share in the rich inheritance of the saints. When hope is based on such knowledge it can indeed stand firm and confident and this hope is based on our Faith and the Love of God whose power is at work sustaining the universe.

The second part of Paul’s prayer reflects on the fact that we can be confident because the power that is at work in our human experience is the same power that God used to raise Jesus Christ from the dead and made him his Right hand man. The idea that Christ was set in the heavenly places is unique to Ephesians but the fact that he was dominant over all powers both present and future is found in both the Old and the New Testament. This is a powerful combination as it links the idea that Jesus the son of man fulfilled God’s purpose for humanity as the climax of creation and the prophecy of David’s greater son being given a share of God’s sovereign rule and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

But if that wasn’t enough there’s even more which is definitely beyond our comprehension. Bible commentators have given over pages and pages of discussion to what God did in Christ by making him head over all things for the church which is his body. Paul uses this metaphor of Christ being the head of the church, and church being the body of Christ elsewhere, but here we are given a glimpse of a reality given by God to us the church, the scale of which is immeasurable. We have through our faith in Christ and the God who worked through Christ, been given by his grace the key to understanding this reality. It enables us to rise above all that threatens our human and social life. Paul is almost being carried away by the cosmic scale of the idea of the fullness of Christ who fills all and is in all.

But Jesus Christ’s Kingship was revealed through his passion, death and resurrection so it should not surprise us that Ezekiel’s image of God as the shepherd seeking out the lost, binding up the injured and strengthening the weak and dealing with those who have abused their position of power by oppressing God’s people. The image of a god, king or other ruler as a shepherd was traditional in the Ancient near east but here the Old Testament is clear that it is YHWH that will save his flock he will be their God and he promises to appoint a shepherd from the line of David who was both a shepherd and a King because he loves them.

Our gospel from Matthew is not a parable about the so called end times like the passages we have heard over the past few weeks but a word picture of the Last Judgement and how we should prepare by living out Jesus’ imperative to love our neighbours especially the marginalised and the needy.

The concept of service to Jesus by serving others goes back to The book of proverbs “whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and will be repaid in full but here the son of man identifies himself with the needy.

Feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, visiting the sick are mundane acts so in a sense, virtue is not far from us, you could say its within each of us if only we are willing. Jesus does not need supernatural feats but simple unobtrusive acts of kindness which help establish his Kingdom rule on earth just as it is in heaven.

Paul gets a bit carried away by cosmic scale of the idea of the fullness of Christ who fills all and is in all, Christ the King who identifies himself with the needy. The challenge for us is to be his church and his body. Helping others to see God’s presence and experience his love, to see the light of Christ in the darkest of times.

Mother Theresa once said “ At the end of our lives we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made or how many great things we have done, we will be judged by I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me, I was homeless and you took me in”.

Michael in this week’s Parish newsletter brought to our attention the situation at our local primary school. This gives us an ideal opportunity to respond to those in need who are on our doorstep.

So as we move into Advent lets provide a little comfort and joy. Stir us up Lord Jesus, help us to play our part in making this happen in our community.

Amen. [1148]