**Sermon Christ the King 21st November 2021 by Rev’d Graham Phillips**

Daniel 7.9–10,13,14

John 18.33-37

There is a story of long ago of a woman trying to explain to a child about the sea. This child had never been away from her hometown, and the largest expanse of water that she had ever seen was a small lake. She did not have access to a television, and this was years before the Internet came into being. The woman was trying to convey the magnitude and the awesomeness of the sea, its varying moods from deep calm to crashing waves and the sense of it being beyond our control  - both frightening and yet also offering an invitation to explore, to head out into the vast unknown. The child could not comprehend the enormity of it. “But surely you could see the other side?” “Surely the waves cannot be as high as a house? That is impossible!” “There cannot be currents that sweep you away, stronger than you.” Question after uncomprehending question. The experience of her little lake did not enable her to perceive the enormity of the ocean.

Pilate is like that in this reading from John’s Gospel. He cannot understand the kingdom that Jesus is talking about. He has been given the authority, the power and responsibility for governing this part of the Roman Empire. Ostensibly he is able to do whatever he likes, whatever he chooses, but as many leaders of today, he discovers the fallacy of that. He is being pressured by the Jewish priests to condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion. Only he has the political authority to do that. And the charge is that Jesus called himself the King of the Jews.

Many years before David refused to kill King Saul because he was God’s anointed Sovereign. David said it was not right to kill the person anointed by God to be King. There is a respect for someone endowed with authority. Pilate was being pushed into a corner by the Jewish priests and he wants a way out for he does not see any reason for putting Jesus to death. It is as if in this conversation he is saying to Jesus - help me out, I want to save you, give me something I can use to protect you.

But Jesus is not willing to co-operate. His mind is focussed on his chosen path to the cross, which he obstinately keeps to, and he gives an answer that must have stupefied Pilate. “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

Pilate draws on the one thing he does understand, “So you are a king? At last we have a common ground.” But in reality he has not understood. His whole experience is of earthly kingdoms, power and authority between one person and another. Jesus is talking about a spiritual kingdom, brought about by God himself. A Kingdom with power and authority that stretches back to the beginning of time. A kingdom with heavenly angels as its citizens. A kingdom that lasts forever and ever. A kingdom that has God and God’s characteristics in every part of it. Truth, holiness, constancy, absolute power brought about and acted on, in and through and by love. A kingdom that overcomes all adversity and evil through patient persevering sacrificial love.

This is not the kingdom of slavery, violence, intrigue, deception, uncertainty, fear, limited durability that Pilate knows. This is a kingdom epitomised in the healing authority of Jesus, in the command over nature, over demons, over sickness that Jesus demonstrated in the three years of his ministry. This is a kingdom shown in the beatitudes, the washing of the disciples’ feet, the allowing of the wiping of his own feet with perfume by Mary. A kingdom of ultimate power, but also a kingdom of humility and service. A kingdom that turns the world upside down, that sees value in actions and words which have a positive effect on other people, that affirm them, that leave their mark for good, that have a permanent effect in the spiritual realm, actions and words that are valued in heaven, that shine like gold.

Just like the little girl and her small lake, Pilate does not understand this. He does not have the spiritual eyes to see what Jesus is referring to.

Do we? Our society, our education system, our values are career, and monetary based. Success is driven and marked by numbers - salary, profit margin, income, outgoings, even attendance at church drives us.

Which of these will be remembered in 200 years time? What part of our lives will have a lasting impact? Are we living beside the small lake or have we found the ocean and are prepared to venture out on it?

We live in two times. The earthly chronological time that goes on second by second. And the heavenly time that we get glimpses on in special rare moments, and which we will enter at our death. We are always living on the brink of eternity, and eternity asks us to engage with it to participate in it. This is God’s call on our lives. To know the fullness of his love for us and to make that known to others.

So the gentle listening we did last week, the unexpected hug we gave, the reaching out in compassion to a friend in need, the affirming look we gave that stranger, the sharing of our resources and time with those less fortunate than ourselves - all these things are part of God’s kingdom. All these actions are part of the truth that Jesus spoke of - the reality of a greater presence living among us and in us - Holy Spirit. The presence of God. All these actions will be remembered and marked in heaven.

So I encourage you. Allow Holy Spirit to open your eyes. To see the vastness of the ocean of God’s Kingdom, of God’s love and to respond fully and openly to the invitation to join in, to worship Jesus Christ the King of kings, Lord of lords. Amen.

Rev’d Graham Phillips