

SERMON FOR CHRIST THE KING

Julie didn't seem to be her usual bubbly self. Joan could hardly get a word out of her. Usually she was full of what Carl had done or said, and how quickly he was learning to speak. Joan didn't want to pry, but she could hardly help noticing that when Julie took her overall off to go for lunch there were bruise marks all the way up her arms. When Joan mentioned this to Julie she muttered something about falling out of bed during the night, but Joan was sure that she saw finger marks. Still Julie brightened up after lunch, and nothing more was said as they talked about Strictly Come Dancing. Only when Julie didn't come in the following day, Joan began to wonder.....

There was trouble in the playground. The Jones twins were at the centre of it as usual. Twice their mother had been called to the school, and this time it was almost certain that the Head would say that despite their ages they would have to be excluded. It was such a pity, because they were such bright kids, really eager to learn, hands up whenever you asked a question. With a heavy heart Sonia their year tutor waded in to separate them from Emily who was on the ground crying. Whatever do you think you are doing said Sonia. It was Idris who answered first, my da says that this is the only way some people understand, and he doesn't stand any nonsense from anyone even my ma. She knows better than to cross him.....

It was funny really, when you think about it even if it was tragic. They were both on the PCC, had been for years, but if you had a pound for every time Tom had started a sentence and not been allowed to finish by Ethel, you would a rich man! I suppose we had got used to it really, Ethel marching in, with Tom trailing behind her. We often wondered if she knew he was there. No one really noticed him becoming more withdrawn, and Arthur at the corner store said that he wasn't particularly surprised that Tom was buying a lot of whisky, because Ethel would drive any man to drink. We really didn't believe it when the Police car came to the house and Tom was led away with a blanket over his head. They say he will plead diminished responsibility whatever that is.....

These are three stories, stories which illustrate the use and misuse of power or control.

Today on the Feast of Christ the King we celebrate the 'Kingship' of Christ. In Biblical times, indeed for much of our own History, Kingship was equated with unlimited power.

In the Old Testament we have descriptions of the Kings of Israel and of Judah, and I guess we can find all our human qualities and frailties exposed as we read about Saul, about David, Solomon and Ahab.

We read about jealousy, about cruelty, about bravery, wisdom, misuse of authority, and about the following of false Gods and prophets. Yes it's is all there, just as we may have watched a very similar set of qualities being exposed in the Television period drama the 'Tudors'

These 'kingly' qualities are all read at third hand. We are fortunate not have had to live through the reigns of these people, to experience at first hand the effect of their activities.

We can identify the qualities in our lives today, more often in others than in ourselves. We can hold them at arms length and disassociate ourselves from them, for in truth we will probably not experience such things in our own lives. These Kings were human, just as we are, and they illustrate what can happen when we are handed power.

Our readings today give us a number of pictures, snapshots to help us to identify the qualities of Christ the King. What do we see...[if you have a projector and some pictures these can be employed here] a rock, a fortress, a refuge [Castle on rock] A shepherd [a Lakeland sheepfold, a shepherd with his flock] A bringer of Peace [Dove, or a peaceful scene] a Crucified King forgiving to the end [Crucifixion scene]

These are very different pictures, and they speak of a different kind of power. The power of the castle is protective. It is the power of the 'Englishman's Castle' ,of the 'home'. It should be a safe place of refuge for all who live in it, a place where love and peace is found, experienced and exchanged. How different from the stories with which I began, and perhaps, how far from our own experiences. If you have been affected by those stories please feel able to speak to me afterwards. The folk in those stories would not find their homes a place of refuge, in fact the very opposite, and all the qualities that come from living and being brought up in a safe environment would be missing from their lives.

This moves us to the 'action' picture of Christ as Shepherd. A shepherd looks after his flock. In Eastern land he leads his flock who follow behind, and a goes out of his way to search for the sheep that is lost, caught up perhaps in a thicket

We will all have a picture in our minds of Christ the Shepherd.... It probably from an early childhood book of bible stories or from our own children's bible and features the shepherd carrying the lost sheep over his shoulder.

This week is a week when we focus on the victims of Domestic Violence, who are in many ways 'lost sheep', not out of choice, but because their lives have lost the place of refuge that should be at the centre, lost the loving arms of father, husband, protector....or of mother for it to be replaced with a world of tension waiting for the next act of violence, desperately hoping for some change, desperately frightened about the consequence of bring things out into the open.

This is where we can become the feet, the hands of Christ. This Diocese is taking forward work to identify and train folk who feel that they may be able to help in such situations, by providing a listening ear, or advice about the facilities that exist to support and protect victims of Domestic Violence. For those who are interested there will be opportunities to provide more practical support and early intervention, and in the long term to work with perpetrators.

Then our final and so familiar picture.... The Christ nailed to the Cross, which bore that ironic inscription 'King of the Jews'. But here we focus today not just on the central figure but on the thief crucified beside Jesus who right at the end of his mortal life recognizes something in Jesus, and something too of the justice of his own fate. In doing so he hears those words of forgiveness, word which we too hear whenever we stand before this picture. This is a King, a Shepherd, for whom it is never too late. No-one is completely written off. His power is in protection, in peace, in forgiveness and in redemption.

Christ came down to earth to be in our places of greatest pain. Sometimes that place is in the very place that it should not be ,the family home, and Christ can use us even when we feel inadequate, or awkward about intervening.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. The Lord God says to you and me. "I love you. I am with you. I will strengthen you. No matter what your situation, I will be with you in the midst of your pain. Today you will be with me in paradise."

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, thank you for showing us that the values of your Kingdom are so different from those of the world in which we live. Help us to take your values into that world, and to work practically to restore loving relationships where there has been breakdown, protection where danger threatens, and to bring the hope of forgiveness into the darkness of the realization of responsibility for our sinful activity.

We ask this in your Name.

