

Last Sunday after Pentecost or The Feast of Christ the King

26th November 2017

Sermon by Br Luke efo

As you all know, the church liturgical year is split into seasons. Much like as the patterns of creation, we mark these various seasons with colours. Green for Ordinary Time, purple for Lent, white for Easter and Christmas, and ether purple (the traditional colours) or blue for Advent. The change in the liturgical seasons is marked by a special liturgical event, or in church speak, a feast day. To make it more complex, the different Christian denominations (and even within a denomination) have different labels for these seasons.

So, for our friends in the Roman Catholic church, today marks the end of Ordinary Time. For some Anglicans, it's the end of the season after Pentecost or the season after Trinity. And even more confusing the Feast days can differ. So today, which is the last Sunday before we start Advent, can be the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the Season after Pentecost or Trinity. It is also the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, but it's not usually called that. You will see the different names in the title of today's pew sheet.

Why does this matter? Well today, the day is identified, either as the Last Sunday, with the liturgical colour of Green, or as the Feast and so the colour should be white. The observant among you may think that I've tried to confuse you. The colour of the altar fall is green, but my stole is white. Now I know that this will slightly annoy the purists among us, because this mixing of colours is not seen as correct.

But as you all also know, while I'm happy to acknowledge what has become an ancient tradition in the church, I passionately believe that our open Eucharistic table means that, we are obligated to not alienate people with practices they do not understand or agree with. So, my way of doing this is to say that today is one of those days that can be celebrated differently and I'm using both colours to do this. None of this will matter next week, because we will have started Advent and our liturgical colour will be blue. Yes blue – not purple.

Today is the end the church liturgical year. In other words, if we converted today's church liturgical date to our normal calendar, today is the 31st of December. And we all have parties on 31 December, as we end one year and enter the new one. So today is either a Feast – 'Christ the King', or the end 'the last Sunday after'.

One last explanation, why 'Christ the King'? The clue to that answer is found in the readings. The gospel passage talks about the last judgement, and in the time when this was written the King or Emperor was the top of the political tree. He was the arbiter and his word was law. He decided the fate of people brought before him, and so Christ is described this way, as he has the final word on people's ultimate fate. He will send people to paradise – heaven, or the fiery pit - hell. How will he decide? He'll look at how we have behaved.

Listen to what Matthew records:

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

And likewise:

⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Put another way, the decision on the fate of the righteous and the unrighteous will all hang on how they have lived, put into practice, the gospel teaching of love. Love of God and love of neighbour. Oh wait, was that the sound of people squirming in their seats that I just heard? Maybe!

Either way it's not a pleasant thought is it? How well have we lived, behaved, will determine our fate! Talk about the consequences of our actions.

This is not the message that a secular, selfish world, whose focus is on the now, on instant gratification, on the seductive thought of: don't wait, do it, or get it now, wants us – or anyone else to hear. It wants us to hear: don't think, let alone worry, about tomorrow or something in the future, do it now, have it now. Don't think of, or pay any attention to those who have nothing, that's their fault. Come join in the hedonistic life of 'now'.

Sound familiar? Sound like the words of some politicians, sound like patterns of behaviours we see all around us? Some people, many people, should be very, very, afraid.

This secular, non-caring message is, as I'm alluding to, one which runs directly opposite to the message of love. If we do not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, we are not loving them as our selves are we. Hence Christ's words here serve both as a teaching, and as a warning.

Yes, yes, I know this is a huge task. There are so many people in these predicaments that we could not possibly help them all. We don't have the time or the resources to be able to do this. But that is not an excuse, to do nothing. We may not have much, but we have our voices. We can be like the prophets of old, call out to the people around us, that there is a better, more caring, more loving way of living. We can call out to the people in power that there is another way.

Yes, we stand on the edges of our communities. But this gives us an advantage, we can see things from a different perspective. Our voice may be little, but like a squeaky wheel, we can speak in places where it can be heard. So, let us commit, or re-commit ourselves to doing this. To calling out, to speaking and acting out of love. So that when we finally stand there before Christ, he tells us that we are to go with the sheep and not the goats.