**Christ the King John 18: 33 -37.**

Once again we arrive at the last Sunday of the Churches year, next week, Advent Sunday, begins our new year and our preparation to celebrate again greeting Jesus into our world.

This last Sunday of the Churches year is known by many as the celebration of Christ the King. In Christian terms it is a fairly recent innovation only starting to be celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church in 1925 and being accepted into the Anglican lectionary in 1970, over 50 years ago I know, but in church time very recent.

Prior to that, and still in some churches, today is known as stir up Sunday due to the collect or post communion prayer which begins; stir up we beseech the O Lord.

Many think it is so called because today you should stir in all the ingredients of the Christmas pudding, but now I guess most come from M & S or similar, if there are any on the shelves this year.

In fact it is a call to stir up the hearts of all faithful people to worship our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Christ the King.

One of the most difficult concepts to preach on, or for any of us to understand, is that of the Holy Trinity, One in Three and three in one. Father Son and Holy Spirit, all God and yet all different in form.

And it is that part of the Trinity we call the Son, Christ, who we also call King.

I know that at times we talk of our God and King, not least in that great hymn, but today is designated as Christ the King which I think is much more accurate and helpful.

What do you think of when you hear the word King?

The most important piece on a chess board, the king in each suit in a pack of playing cards, King Street which occurs in many cities and towns.

I used to get the subway at King and Bathurst in Toronto when I first lived there. You may think of Elvis Presley, known by many as The King. There was a hurricane King in Florida in 1950 which caused massive damage.

The word King appears in so many different ways in our usage but probably most of us think of a male Monarch when we hear the word King.

A supreme or absolute head of a state and government, either in reality or symbolically. A monarch is normally not elected but usually comes to power by right of birth and holds the title and post for life.

So a King is not just a name for things, but someone who is real, someone who we can see and hear, now or in the past, just as we see and hear each other.

God is the supreme being the creator of everything but who we cannot see, even Moses hid his face in the presence of God.

But, as we will celebrate again in just a few weeks, Christ was sent by God to be with us in human form, to be real.

In his trial and at His crucifixion many called Him mockingly King of the Jews, but He was and is King over all creation.

This is referred to in our reading from John's Gospel when Pilot questions Jesus. Jesus, a King but not an earthly one.

And that is what we celebrate today, Christ who was real and in human form and is now still real but returned to the father and sits at His right hand.

He came to us not only to show us the way to eternal life.

Christ came to us, to all of creation, to make clear the power and the love of God for all His creation and so it is right that we call Him King, supreme and absolute head of our church and of our lives.

He also came to teach us and to show us how God wants us to live in His creation, how to be good stewards of our world and how to live together with each other, however different we may be.

But although today we celebrate Christ the King we cannot separate Him from God the Father or the Holy Spirit, as all are one, part of the Holy and eternal Trinity which has the ultimate authority over everything.

I believe it is good to remind ourselves of these things before we get carried away with our celebrations of the birth of Christ and all that goes with the celebration of Christmas.

In our reading we saw a questioning Pilot, he did not understand what was going on, I doubt he understood the reply Jesus gave to him. He was a man of the world and understood the power a King could wield and yet in front of him was an ordinary man who did not even claim greatness.

There is nothing wrong in not understanding everything, even in having doubts about our faith or aspects of it, we are in good company, then and now. Remember not long after his appointment even our Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby admitted to having doubts from time to time.

Perhaps the most common cause for doubt is the question I was often asked by those I met in the hospice, patients or their relatives or by those grieving when I meet to discuss funeral arrangements.

Why does God allow suffering? So and so went to church regularly was a good person and yet why are they suffering now or did suffer.

There have been over the centuries many answers given to this question, I would suggest that many of them have been the cause of even greater pain and suffering by loading guilt on to pain by trying to say that suffering is a punishment for sin. Or that if we still suffer even though we pray that is because our faith which is not strong enough.

I do not accept either of those ideas.

Others have tried to say that it is through suffering and dealing with it that we grow, the no pain no gain approach. Again I do not accept that.

Still others say that suffering is what allows God to show his love for us. Sorry, again that does not strike me how the God I know would behave.

So what is the answer, and this is where I admit to having a real problem, I don’t have one.

Suffering, pain, does exist, I have seen it affecting many people who I know had a strong faith, who I know had tried their very best to lead a good life, never hurting anyone or causing suffering to others. And yet still they suffered.

I am absolutely convinced that God does not impose suffering on us nor is it a result of our own sin or actions. Although I do accept that there are lifestyle issues which can bring pain and suffering on ourselves at times.

In the end I think we have to make a choice, to accept our great limitations, that there is so much we do not understand and put our trust in God to guide us, wherever it may lead knowing he is always with us whatever happens. Or we can blame God for everything and be constantly angry.

It is perhaps summed up well in the prayer by Reinhold Neiburh the American Theologian. You probably recognise the first part often paraphrased, but I would like to read it all as it was written.

God, give me grace to accept with serenity

the things that cannot be changed,

Courage to change the things

which should be changed,

and the Wisdom to distinguish

the one from the other.

Living one day at a time,

enjoying one moment at a time,

Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace

taking, as Jesus did,

this sinful world as it is,

not as I would have it,

Trusting that You will make all things right,

If I surrender to Your will,

so that I may be reasonably happy in this life,

and supremely happy with You forever in the next.

AMEN