

## **'Christ the King'**

A sermon preached by Canon Andrew Knowles at St George's Church Kendal on the Feast of Christ the King, 20 November 2016.

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From our New Testament reading: St Paul's Letter to the Colossians Chapter 1 v 17

*'He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.'*

Any of us who've been involved with Children's work: Sunday School, holiday clubs, or school assemblies, know that when all else fails you can always sing 'Who's the King of the Jungle?':

*Who's the King of the jungle?  
Who's the King of the sea?  
Who's the King of the universe  
And who's the King of me?*

*I tell you J-E-S-U-S is – He's the King of me;  
He's the King of the universe, the jungle and the sea!*

It has geography, natural history, theology, spelling – and suspect grammar. Children like it because they get to behave like little monkeys – which comes naturally enough for some.

It also contains, as with many children's songs, important truth: that Jesus *is* the King of everything.

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When I was asked, in an online survey, which I thought was the most important verse in the Bible, I chose this one:

*'He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together.'*

Today is the Feast of Christ the King – the final summit of the Church's Year – when we celebrate all that we have discovered and described of the supreme 'kingship' of Jesus Christ.

He is 'the Word' who 'became flesh', John tells us in his Gospel, and 'lived among us' – 'camped out with us' is the way he puts it (John 1:14).

This Word and Wisdom of God existed before ever the universe came into being and was present at the dawn of Creation: expressed in another children's favourite:

*'I danced in the morning when the world was begun'*

And what was he like, when he became a human being?

Why, says John, he was 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:17).

That was our Christmas story – and the story of his earthly ministry.

In Holy Week we remembered how Jesus, the Lamb of God, bore our sins on the Cross

And at Easter that he rose victorious from the grave.

He ascended to the presence of his Father, to resume his place in glory –

and now holds together our humanity with his divinity

our earth with his heaven,

our time with his eternity . . .

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When we celebrate that ‘Jesus is King’, we shouldn’t overlook that we are enormously blessed with our own Queen, Elizabeth. Even for those of us who are aged 90 or 100, she has reigned for most of our lives. And she has been a model of humility, wisdom and devotion to duty.

When we look around the world, there’s no shortage of examples of alternative styles of rule, in the most appalling tyrannies and dictatorships. But isn’t it interesting that the gauge by which we measure a leader - be it monarch, president, prime minister, or chief executive - is always that of Christ.

We always look for that combination of truthful, unselfish authority, which we see in him.

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When we say of Jesus Christ that ‘in him all things hold together’, I always want to rush to particle physics and talk about the wonders of the universe, both macro and micro – But I don’t think that’s what St Paul had in mind when he wrote to his friends at Colossae.

Of course, everything does hold together – or is held together – and belongs together – and is absolutely mutually dependant – But I don’t think that’s Paul’s point. I don’t think he’s talking about what we would call the ‘science’. I think he’s talking about what we have learned to recognise as ‘love’ – that over-riding, under-girding, *permeating* reality in which we are blessed to live and move and have our being.

And the one who came from God and is one with God, who reveals and ministers and personifies that love - is Jesus the King.

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On occasions they tried to make Jesus ‘king’ –and he avoided it (John 6:15).

On occasion he was asked if he was a king and he prevaricated (John18:37).

But when he was executed, the placard on his cross stated, in three languages, that he was 'King of the Jews' - anointed with a woman's perfume, robed as a joke, crowned with thorns and enthroned on a gallows, with hammer and nails.

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For Jews, a crucified messiah was a failed messiah, and yet we read in our gospel today – a story that's only recorded by St Luke – that even as he was dying, Jesus reached out to a fellow sufferer and gave him hope:

*'Today you will be with me in Paradise'* (Luke 23:43)

'This very day you and I will walk together in the garden of heaven.'

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The point about Jesus being 'King' - about all things holding together - is that the universe is *relational*; and it came into being - and is sustained by – love.

The gospels show us Jesus, the Word and Wisdom of God, encountering any number of people and uniquely addressing the needs – the deepest needs – sometimes the secret needs - of each one. And, especially in John's Gospel, he will then explain a little of who he is.

To the woman at the well he says, 'If you knew who you were talking to you would ask him for living water' (John 4:10).

To the man born blind, who Jesus heals, Jesus asks him: 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' - because with your new eyes, you are looking at him (John 9:37).

And when Governor Pilate asks Jesus 'What is truth?', of course, the one who is 'the way, the truth and the life', is standing in front of him (John 18:38).

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Jesus is King.

The universe is relational – intended and tended by self-giving, saving love.

And how will we respond?

I was taken with the opening words of the New Testament reading. Paul writes to his friends at Colossae: *'May you be strong'* (Colossians 1:11).

Strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power (1:11); with Easter morning, resurrection strength; with Pentecostal, gift of the Spirit strength;

Strong as in patient through testing, maybe discouraging times – strong to endure (1:11)

Strong as in joyful – giving thanks to God for the Big Picture, that we are citizens of heaven – sharing in the inheritance of the saints in light (1:12).

'May you be strong' says Paul.

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We are constantly presented with the troubles of the world. What we remember today is that, whatever the world's questions, God's answer is that Jesus is King and the Church is his body.

*'We are the Body of Christ'* (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Is the Kingdom of God gone wrong – But what will the world look like with the Kingdom of God gone *right*?

Our leaders, even the best, are fallible and flawed - What will it look like when Jesus alone is King?

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As churches together in the Beacon Team, we have the opportunity this morning to renew our commitment to Christ the King; offering our gifts and ministries, whatever they are – and I love the emphasis – which is no less than the truth – that every single contribution is unique and indispensable.

*'We are the Body of Christ'*: called and commissioned to minister his saving love - a love which holds all things together; a love which reaches - and heals - the deepest need - Because he is Christ the King - *our* King.