Christ the King – Sunday before Advent – 22nd November 2026

Well – here we are – at the end of the year! What happened? - We aren't even in December yet. The Church's year begins in Advent looking forward to the return of Jesus, it passes through Jesus' birth, his life on earth, his death and resurrection, his ascension into heaven and the giving of the Holy Spirit. The year culminates in the Festival of Christ the King as we celebrate the true kingship of Christ and his authority over the world. This points us forward to his return in glory and power – and brings us full-circle to Advent.

Our Gospel reading comes after a series of parables and teaching which stress the importance of being ready for Jesus' return which will take people by surprise. God will separate the saved and unsaved the way that a Middle Eastern shepherd separates the sheep and goats in flock at night. I have lived in Beirut and from time to time a shepherd would bring his flock of sheep and goats past through our neighbourhood. Our office was at ground level so the shepherd would sell sheep and goat milk cheese through the windows to our staff while the flock picked its way around the rubble and building sites. Middle Eastern sheep are very different to ours, in fact they do look very much like goats!

Like the sheep and the goats, the saved and unsaved are allowed to live together at present. We are not to try and judge who is among the saved, that is for Jesus alone and it will be revealed when he returns as judge – and he sees all that is in our hearts.

Those chosen for eternal life are taken by surprise, they had not been trying to work their way into heaven by charitable deeds (which is impossible for salvation is the free gift of Jesus), they had showed un-self-conscious practical love to those in need in Christ's family. This was the evidence of their faith and commitment to Christ. True faith will be expressed in the way we live, and in what we do. God has had a plan for us from the creation of the world which will ultimately be revealed to us.

As is so often the case, Jesus' teaching is shocking, intended to pull us up short and revaluate ourselves, are we turning a blind eye to need and suffering? – and by doing so perhaps rejecting Christ.

Who are those of Jesus' family for whom we should be concerned? – First and foremost it must be our fellow believers who are suffering and in need, but it goes beyond this to all those in need. If we have Christ's mind and love in us we will share his concern for the poor and needy, for prisoners, the sick and the broken-hearted. This will be expressed in practical ways.

Perhaps now is the time to make our New Year resolutions!

Charles Randall