

Sermon on Sunday 24 November 2024

Christ the King

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: Psalm 8 & John 18. 33-38

Christ the Truth-teller

What is truth?

Pilate's famous question continues to be one of Life's biggest.

What *is* true? What is *real*?

And can we ever actually know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Truth matters. It's important to separate fact from fiction. But, equally, we live in a culture of misinformation and 'fake news', and, understandably, we're deeply suspicious of truth claims, especially when they come via institutions, and particularly when it's about those things that we can't prove with facts or hard evidence, what we might call Truth with a capital T. For many, that kind of Truth is relative; a matter of perspective. The Welsh

rock band Manic Street Preachers summed it up brilliantly in the title of their 1998 album, 'This is my Truth, tell me yours'.

Any religion, therefore, that claims to have a monopoly on the Truth is seen as naïve or dangerous. The counter response has been the rise in religious fundamentalism with its attractive claims to certainty. And, let's face it, in these hugely uncertain times, many crave that certainty, that security of airtight answers.

But faith has never been about airtight answers. And the Bible is a wrestling with the Truth (capital T), not an inerrant rulebook. It's a wonderfully complicated library of ancient documents, inspired by God, yes, but written by human beings with agendas of their own in a culture and language distant and foreign to us. And because of that, it leaves itself open to a breadth of interpretation. And that's ok, actually; Truth deserves to be wrestled with. And when we come to different conclusions, well then, we agree to disagree, and we hold our 'Truth' lightly and humbly, always trying to remain open-minded and open-hearted.

Many religious people are obsessed with being right. The thing is that if there was ever one group that Jesus railed against, it was the religious people who believed they were right. Jesus tore up huge chunks of their rule book. He challenged the very heart of their religion. And ironically, instead, he refused to give his own neat and tidy theology sewn up with neat and tidy answers.

Instead, he answered questions with questions, and he told stories designed to invite us into that territory of the imagination and the heart; stories which speak with a deep and ancient and personal wisdom.

Jesus was a Truth-teller and that, of course, got him into a whole lot of trouble.

Truth-tellers aren't often those in power. Powerful people often have too much invested in the status quo. From court jesters to civil rights campaigners, whistleblowers to climate activists, truth-tellers have always been our prophets, the ones who speak truth to power.



Today is the festival of Christ the King. And, for some of us, that title is helpful and meaningful because it's about honouring and paying tribute to the Christ we serve, the One who reigns over a Kingdom. For others, it's less helpful, but what we all need to remember is that if Jesus was a King, he was a King like no other.

Born into poverty and shame, he chose to live among the poor and the disregarded; became the Servant King who washed feet and asked his followers to do the same.

Always, this King lived a Truthful and uncompromised life. He lived bravely and authentically even in the face of arrest and death. Always he was True to who he was and to what he was called to. And part of that calling was to show us how to live and love and die, but mostly live; how to be more fully alive. He didn't come to create carbon copies of himself, he came to help us all step into our full and True and unique identities; to live Truthfully, bravely, lovingly, authentically.

What does that mean for you, I wonder? In other words, what is the Truest and best version of you? And how do we get there? Are there things we need to let go of, for example, or things we need courage to take hold of?

And in what ways have we failed to live Truthfully? How have we settled for a compromised half-life rather than striving to become more of the extraordinary person we were made to be? Have we perhaps believed half-truths or lies about ourselves?

The good news is that the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth is that God believes we are worthy of love and belonging; that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and that we are called to live fearlessly and full of wonder.

Just a few hours before Jesus stood prisoner before Pilate, he said something startling and enigmatic; he said '*I am* the way, the truth and the life'. What a claim! Are these the words of a deluded

megalomaniac, or, a clue perhaps not only to *his* true identity but also to *ours*?

He is, I think, saying that we discover our True selves through him.

He is the Way – follow his example of courageous and compassionate Truth-telling and Truth-living.

He is the Truth - listen to his wisdom and to what he believes about you.

And he is the Life - in relationship with him, we discover what our lives are for; we come to life.

So, what is Truth (capital T)?

Truth, I believe, is a relationship with the ultimate Reality that some call God. And relationships aren't fixed and unchanging like an equation or a fact, they are dynamic and unfolding like a love story or an adventure, an adventure we're all called to experience. Ain't that the Truth!