

Sunday 21st November 2021 (Christ The King)

10.00am Sung Eucharist – St Nicolas

Readings: Revelation 1:4b-8 and John 18: 33-37

I've probably mentioned before, that when I arrived in my first parish in Rural Oxfordshire, I caused a bit of a 'stir'!

I don't think the problem was actually my fault – if anything, it was the fault of my predecessor – a very good and holy man, who had always walked around the villages wearing his black cassock. He made a concession on his day off, when the cassock was exchanged for a sober lounge suit with a white shirt and dark tie, I'm told.

I arrived, and went around the place in cords, a sloppy jumper and green wellies! The lounge suit was firmly reserved for Remembrance Sunday and visits by the Bishop! And as for walking down the street in a cassock - well, I think you know!

And worst of all – on the night of my Induction, I went to the village pub with my friends, and a few of my new parishioners! Oh no!

The problem, I think was all to do with expectations – expectations, based on their experience of what a Rector should look like!

It wasn't a problem for long, because they soon got used to it, but it did prove that being 'different' can cause a whole load of bother!

Take royalty, for instance. Even in our own generation, we have fairly firm expectations of what royalty should be like, and how they should behave. And as soon as they don't, the press whip us up into a frenzy of disapproval. And although we may grumble about the cost of the

civil list, we still like to see our royals at 'big' occasions, sumptuously dressed and sparkling with jewels.

And this was the problem which Jesus had! He just didn't match up to the expectations of what a King should be like! He was different right from the start

- He was born in a barn, not a royal palace
- To parents from the working classes
- He didn't even fit in with his family, for he did things which even they found difficult or embarrassing.
- At one point in his ministry, in a passage which hardly ever seems to get read, his family were so concerned about him that they besieged the house where he was staying in order to bring him home (Take a look, sometime at Matt.12:46-50).
- He cared for the poor and outcast.
- He washed his disciples feet.

How could a king – a 'Messiah', even, be a servant, shepherd and carer?

And, of course, he was regarded as dangerously odd by the religious authorities, and the kingdom about which he preached was not a kingdom that anybody recognised.

The sort of preaching that affirmed poor people and outcasts was likely to inflame the passions of all sorts of people! And so they crucified him!

So, what are we to make of this kingdom where wealth in human terms is unknown, and the king is a servant of all? It sounds very

much like a contradiction in terms. "*King*" is opposite to "*servant*", as many people who have tried to play both the leader role and the servant role at the same time, have found to their cost.

Yet, in our generation, right here in Cranleigh, we are all called to be citizens of this upside-down Kingdom, and we are called to gather others to join us!

So, in order to do that, we need to be prepared to let the love of Christ the King turn our lives upside-down, we need to allow all our prejudices and long-held assumptions to melt away, so that people see Christ's teaching alive and at work in us!. Effectively, we need to work at becoming more Christ-like!

When I was on Iona just a couple of months ago, along with a number of you, I was struck again, as I always am, by the way that place, both throughout history, and in its worship today, has become such a symbol of broken-down barriers! In the Abbey Churchyard, 48 ancient Kings of Scotland, 4 Irish Kings, 8 Norwegian Kings and one British leader of the Labour Party, are buried alongside, and in amongst the locals who have lived and breathed Iona and worked its ancient land.

In the Abbey Worship, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Quakers, and everyone else that you can think of, are able to worship God alongside those who have no allegiance to any church! And the wonderful thing is, that nobody seems to worry about it!

For me, and many others, when visiting Iona, just for a few days it is truly liberating to be able to forget that you're Anglican, and just be a follower of Christ. The Worship of the Iona Community is so successful, because it is not afraid to break the rules and be daring and different!

Here in the parish, as you can read in the notices, we are on the verge of doing a new thing – of being different, in our radical proposal to worship as one congregation in two places at 10am on Sundays

As I have already demonstrated, being different is dangerous! But . . .

.

. . . . if I hadn't been different in Longworth back in 1997, they would still think that Vicars always wore black cassocks and couldn't possibly go in the village pub!

. . . . if Iona wasn't different, then it wouldn't be the great centre of pilgrimage and renewal that it has become.

. . . . and if Jesus hadn't been a different sort of King, he wouldn't have been crucified, there wouldn't have been a resurrection, we wouldn't be sat here this morning, and there wouldn't be a worldwide Christian Church with 2.1 billion followers!

. . . . and (and this is the really important bit) if the Church today doesn't dare to be different, and to bend to the culture of the day and the context and needs of its local community, I'm really afraid that it will become strangled by its own rigidity, and it will die!

We are on the verge of doing something, which I believe is exciting, and in total harmony with our mission to be a church which is Caring, Sharing and Daring!

But this needs resourcing – both financially, and in terms of human resources!

We need to step up to the mark, looking at the pattern of Christ's Kingship, and looking at models of ministry which actually work and feed the faithful, while reaching out to the lost, in order to make the kingdom something which is not a distant hope of what happens to us when we die, but something which is being lived out, right here, in our daily cycle of work, prayer, discipleship and worship!