

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Feast of Christ the King/Reign of Christ

Sunday 20 November 2022

Embodying the love of Christ who holds all things together

I have always felt ambivalent about Christ the King/reign of Christ because of its connotations about power.

It often reminds me of triumphalist Christianity.

It reminds me of models of the church that want to tell other people who is in or out.

There are still those who think God's power is about seeking political power to prevent the passing of so called 'ungodly' laws.

This is the sort of Christianity that says 'we'll tell you what's good for you and we will impose it on you'.

We often see power as power over, the force of might and of money. There is a lot of it about when you think of Putin, of Murdoch, of Trump, of North Korea, and the power of lobby groups that use their money to serve their own needs no matter what it means for the planet.

Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely – look at what Elon Musk is doing to the company Twitter.

How do we talk of the reign of Christ, of Christ as King in a way that is helpful for us, that is life giving?

What is the sort of power that Jesus embodies?

What do today's readings tell us about that?

In Jeremiah God's power is one that gathers people together rather than driving people away, that is wise and just where everyone is safe.

For the Song of Zechariah it is about being set free.

In Colossians Jesus is the image of the invisible God who uses power to create and reconcile and that in in him all things hold together. In Christ we see a snapshot of who God is.

In him all things hold together.

The Colossians reading keeps repeating the word 'all', reminding us that Jesus is one who draws together and holds all together.

God is the one who is with us and acts to create and to gather and hold, all of creation and of all people.

What does it mean to hold all things together?

Being held is a feeling of safety, of protection, that nothing can be lost. It is about love. A child held in a parent's arms is safe.

This gesture says you are okay, I love you I hold you, I am with you.

God in Jesus is saying that all things are held in God.

It is a power that includes, that welcomes, that says yes.

The power of holding is the power of accepting and of forgiving.

The power of holding is about bringing all together in reconciling love, bringing together the fragments of lives that we may be made whole and holy.

The power that we see Jesus embody is the positive power of deciding to hold all things together by the letting go of his own life in arms outstretched on the cross.

The power that Jesus embodies on the cross is one that does not save himself but follows the path of obedient love.

He lets himself go to his death to hold us in death, to be with us in all that living and dying means, to hold us forever.

It is a paradoxical power where he saves others by not saving himself.

Jesus actively chooses to continue the way of love.

The cosmic creating Christ chooses to recreate and hold together by the gift of his life.

The words of the King on the cross are words of forgiveness. He prays for those who abuse him, he says to the criminal today you will be with me in paradise.

One of the key events of Christianity, Jesus' death on the cross is not a power play in language we are used to at all.

It is not the power play of retaliation, competition and being self-protective but is the power of one who dares to trust the divine love that takes him to the cross and beyond.

God's power is about creating and loving and holding.

It is the power of love that is for and with us.

It is a love that keeps saying to us remember that you are held.

Remember that today you are with me and I with you.

What does this say about the sort of power that we are called to live, to embody?

It is to be reminded of the vast all-encompassing love of a creator that has always been there.

It is to hope in the creating God who keeps creating who is with us in life and death and beyond.

It is to take the risk to reach out our hands to support others, to remind them that they are loved and welcome and accepted too.

It is the sort of love expressed by the soccer Player Awer Mabil.

His motivation to train hard and to succeed is to open the way for others to follow him. His drive to train and play on the world stage is to open the way for other African layers like him that they will be better than him.

Jesus' power is the power of love that wants us all to flourish and live life to the full, that is self-giving and generous, a love that endures and is present

The power of this king is the power of gracious love that endures forever.

This is what we are called to embody knowing that Jesus goes before us.

*Though hope desert my heart
Though strangeness fill my soul
Though truth torment my troubled mind
You have been here before.*

*Though confidence run dry
Though weary flesh be sore
Though conversation bear no fruit
You have been there before.*

*There is no threatening place
No trial I could know
Which has not known your presence first
You have been here before*

*In Christ who on the cross
felt all our heart and more
and cried in deep abandonment and isolation
You have been here before.*

*So I will not dread the dark
The fate beyond control
Nor fear what reigns in frightening images
You will be there before*

Amen, Amen

Lectio:
Jeremiah 23.1-6
Song of Zechariah
Colossians 1.11-20
Luke 23.33-43