



Rev Diana Rattray
The kin-dom of Christ
Ezekiel;
Matthew 35:31-45
Year A Reign of Christ
26 November 2023

Today is one of the days in our Lectionary which is potentially a mash up day. We can observe the Reign of Christ - formally Christ the King, in New Zealand we are asked to observe Aotearoa Sunday where we give thanks and pray for the work of the Māori church and Bishops; and church and it is also the last Sunday of the Church year - where we are “stirred up” before we head into Advent and prepare for the coming of Christ among us. Perhaps the mash up day is representative of the complexity of our country and our world at the moment. New government here which may or may not align with what we see as priorities of the day. A complex, destructive situation in the Middle East where the most of the victims are innocent civilians caught up in the atrocities of war. Financial and other associated pressures as we end the church year and as the commercial world would like us to buy for and celebrate Christmas – before we have even begun Advent or hit December. As we heard the gospel read this morning many of you may have personalised it, even mentally berated yourselves for not being there for the prisoners, the hungry, the naked, the homeless - and yes there is always more that we can do. However this gospel passage today is a story not of the judgement of individuals rather of the judgement of a nation. We possibly skip over the words in the second verse - All the nations will be gathered before him. It is a collective sorting of sheep and goats. Yet we do have personal and collective responsibility. In many ways Matthew’s depiction of the last judgement is like a wellness check. Its purpose is not to scare or condemn but to provide a snapshot of

our overall health, development, learning and growth that should lead to new habits and ways of life. God created the world out of an abundance of love. That love is continuously poured out on all people - and we are created in God's image. The Wairua Tapu, the Holy Spirit, is God continuously pouring out love on all people, showing God's own self as well as who we are. We are created in God's image. Our lives, our way of living, individually and collectively is to be lived out in love. Perhaps we can look on this passage as a wellness check - even a warning to those who live in unhealthy, self-centred ways. Recalibrate our lives.[1]

Perhaps it is asking us to be Stirred Up, individually and collectively. On this Sunday last year we made a cake as part of the service and sermon. The symbolism of the ingredients and the stirring of the cake is an illustration of our Christian life. Eggs for new life, the fruit of the spirit, the flour that is used to bind all together and symbolising the body of Christ. The wine -the blood of Christ etc.

Now I have not organised a cake to be made today – but you might be someone who continues the tradition of making your Christmas cakes or puddings today so they sit and cure nicely during Advent. One of the dangers of this gospel passage is the somewhat twee response that I helped someone because we “saw the face of Jesus”. The danger is that we do not recognise each person for who they are, who they are created in the image of God. Or we see them just with the label they are given by our judgemental society - poor, homeless, queer, gang member, politician. Everyone is a person first, a person in their own right, loved and recognised by God. We often lose the personhood. “Please love me because I am me, not because you imagine I am someone I am not”. This also allows us to see the love of God in action beyond what we are familiar with, beyond our usual understanding of God. Our status or achievements do not matter. It is our continuing willingness to let the life of God be lived through us, concretely: our love for all people. It is a love for people as they are - not a love for people as we would like them to be.

At a recent Anglican Women's Hui - a gathering of women from our three tikanga churches those of us there heard of the work of women

in places and churches which are very different from St Matthew-in-the-City in terms of theology, and imagery used. A few decades ago gatherings of women in our church would have focussed on avoiding hierarchical and masculine imagery of God. This was recognised in our worship, liturgy music. This was not the case at the recent Hui, and although some language and imagery grated with me I had to sit in the context of the work of Christ in the bigger picture. Ways of being church and re-imagining church that is meeting the needs of people in places where a sense of community, or faith, or belonging has been lost to the point of the breakdown of societal structures. The ministry being offered is beyond many of our day to day experiences. However what was also very apparent is the expectation of women leaders in the church is still very different than that for men. The observation of this last Sunday of the Church year as Christ the King is relatively recent. It was first observed in 1925 in Italy when there was still a male King as head of that nation. The Headship, the King imagery continues to perpetuate a hierarchical top down model that can be used to perpetuate masculine domination – within and outside the church. Jesus spoke of the *basileia ton theon* which is often translated as the “kingdom of God.” A number of years ago, a Hispanic feminist theologian, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz suggested that a more accurate translation of baselia would be the term kin-dom. To lose the “g” from king. “The kin-dom of God that Jesus spoke of is the family of God; a family of sisters and brothers of Jesus who embody God to one another and to the world. This kin-dom of which Jesus spoke goes beyond the bounds of family, tribe or blood. When the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality, we will all be sisters and brothers, kin to one another; a family of God dwelling together in the kin-dom. Jesus insisted that the kin-dom is within us all.”[2]

It is expressed in te Ao Maori the concept of whanaungatanga. Whanaungatanga is about forming and maintaining relationships and strengthening ties between kin and communities. This value is the essential glue that binds people together, providing the foundation for a sense of unity, belonging and cohesion. Rev Dr Hirini Kaa in his fabulous book *Te Hahi Mihinare* writes of the journey towards a

Māori Anglican bishop, the translation of the prayer book into te reo of the prayer book, and talks about the development of a distinctive Māori Anglican ministry for today's world.[3]

If we are kin to one another then we look out for and care for each other in a different way. The gospel passage from Matthew is part of Matthew's down to earth approach. Love is always a participation in Christ's love however we measure it. Love is a leveller. So on this mash up Sunday, in the midst of life that may seem daunting, even frightening, with images of dominance and power as well as examples of earthed compassionate ministry at the heart of it all is love. Love that is all embracing. However we see Christ in our stories, our texts, our lives, Christ is the one who points to the Love that lies at the heart of it all. And it is pointing to what lies beyond how we see Christ in the here and now.

So we end the church year, we move into a season of preparation knowing that the human spirit which may be crushed by fear and hatred can also be restored and empowered by love. Rather than letting our fears feed hatred let our hopes feed love.

I finish with the collect for Aotearoa Sunday.

God of the southern sea and of these islands, of Maori, Pakeha and all who dwell in our land; we give you thanks and praise for our country, and for what we have achieved together. Increase our trust in one another; strengthen our quest for justice, and bring us to unity and a common purpose. Amen. (NZPB adapted)

[1] <https://billloader.com/MtChristKing.html>

[2] <https://pastordawn.com/2016/11/16/jesus-remember-me-when-you-come-into-your-kingdom-a-sermon-for-the-last-sunday-of-the-church-year/>

[3] Te Hāhi Mihinare | The Māori Anglican Church

Hirini Kaa, BWB 2020.