

CHRIST THE KING ALL SAINTS BIRKENHEAD  
THE REVEREND JORDAN GREATBATCH  
2020

It has been 4 years since Donald Trump quite extraordinary became the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. It saw a complete outsider take control of one of the most powerful positions in the world. If anything, that election taught us the power of popularity. Donald Trump's comments throughout the election seemed to have spoken to so many Americans who felt powerless. They had lost their jobs, perhaps they were sick of the political elite. Whatever the reason, Trump seemed to offer them power back. But this sort of power was not one we would approve of, rather it was a power of division, insult and strength.

We see this sort of power expressed not only in America but all around the world. We only have to think of the current President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte and his death

squads. Leaders of nations want to keep their power so they use arms and intimidation to maintain their position. People feel they are being mistreated so they use force to attempt to take back their power. People want something they haven't got so they use power to force others to give them their desire. And we who watch from afar feel powerless to do anything about the situation.

Trying to get what we want is how most of us exercise our power. It happens for individuals as well as for countries. We are always trying to get done what we want, sometimes for our own benefit, sometimes for the benefit of others. I suppose how we use power is the art of politics. It goes on in the church as much as anywhere else in our society.

2

Of course from time to time we all feel powerless. We feel we have no influence to achieve anything for ourselves or for others. But all of us have

power and we do well to recognize its presence. There is nothing wrong with power. The way we use it is what is important. When we use our power to bring about good for others, when we use our power to ensure others get what they need, then we are using power well. When we use our power to dominate others and to control people as if they were objects, then we are using our power unwisely.

Of course we organize our societies by having the people with the most power at the top. Royalty has become a universal symbol of the people in power. They are the ones who are supposed to care for their people and to ensure they have protection. They symbolize for us the ultimate in power. That's why they are dressed in formal robes, have crowns on their head, hold an orb, the world, in their hand. Like someone else, when they are good they are very very good, but when they are bad they are horrid.

3

It's not just fairy stories where kings and queens are good or bad. Real life has many examples of rulers who are both good and bad.

It is only natural that we should see Jesus as king. He is the ruler who has ultimate power. Yet there is something completely different about his power. He reveals this to us on his teaching of the sheep and the goats. His qualifier for those who enter the Kingdom are the epitome of the type of King he is. We see here no great appeal to greatness, wealth or power. But rather how one cares for the broken and the vulnerable. This is the sort of King we reflect on today. Christ the King is a reminder to us of what true power looks like. It is not in threats of violence or political maneuvering, but rather in humility and love for one's neighbor.

This is no truer in the famous exchange of Jesus with the criminals on the cross as he stood dying on that Good Friday. Their perceived idea of power and kingship is one who will use strength and might to have power. Just as the soldiers

mock him, they represent the power of Rome, of Caesar, a brutal regime that created the awful punishment of crucifixion. They use intimidation and coercion to get what they want. But Jesus' response is quite the opposite. When he says "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" Jesus is not saying his kingdom is simply spiritual. He is in fact contrasting the worldly domination used by Rome, with the service to others of his own Kingdom. Jesus' kingdom is one of love, justice and service.

Here we see the reason for celebrating today's feast of the Reign of Christ, or Christ the King. In him we see the sort of rule or leadership which the church should be showing to the world.

4

Jesus came to the world to inaugurate a reign of peace and fellowship, of justice and respect for people's rights, of love for God and therefore for one another. This is the sort of kingdom Jesus began; this is what we must continue.

Our task is to keep building this kingdom where the leaders are doing what Christ did. We will see the kingdom being built where people are challenging power when improperly used, challenging leaders who seek to dominate and intimidate, challenging structures which cause death rather than bringing life.

5

On this last Sunday of the Church Year we are encouraged to reflect on our own use of power. Is the leadership we exercise like that of Pilate or like that of Jesus? Are we searching for justice, are we respecting people, are we loving God and others? Can we challenge appropriately when we see leadership which does not follow the servant who has called us. Will others see in our communities the kingdom of God active and alive in the present moment? Let us give thanks for Christ the king, for in him we can be sure of a kingdom where respect and justice prevail. And let us pray earnestly, your kingdom come.