

Today begins the last week of the Christian year. It used to be little more than the 'Sunday Next Before Advent' and was characterised more by the Collect (now post communion prayer) from the Book of Common Prayer, *Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people*", than by any sense of the completion or the end of a drama.

Once upon a time, because of the words of the collect, this was the Sunday on which the members of a household took turns to stir up the Christmas pudding, making a wish while doing so. Hence, its other name - "Stir-up Sunday". Did you know, for example, that the pudding should be stirred from east to west in honour of the journey of the Magi? Did you know that your pudding should contain thirteen ingredients in honour of Christ and his twelve disciples? We won't try and name them all now...it's a trifling matter...

For all this talk of pudding might get in the way of the need to consider where we, as a church community and as individuals, find ourselves spiritually as we stand on the precipice of the Church's year with the season of Advent (although not before St Andrew's day of course...). Today, in addition to the culinary associations of stir up Sunday, we are commemorating the Feast of Christ the King. And this feast, although relatively recent, sits well as the last scene in the drama of the Christian year. A drama played out in the prophet Daniel's great vision and echoed in John's book of Revelation that we have heard read this morning.

We ask what does it mean for Christ to be king in our lives? How are we to prepare for the coming kingdom of Christ and how can we live in His kingdom on earth now? Part of the answer to that question is to allow ourselves to be 'stirred up'. I don't mean by this fired up with zeal. Better bakers among you – and we know from our Baby and Toddler group that there are many here at St Andrew's – will know that one of the things that stirring achieves is evenness, wholeness - when we are stirred up we become simple and integrated, the same

person at church, at work, in our families and with our friends; the same person in public and in private. Our lives and our character are not compartmentalised, not an isolated mix of different ingredients or parts but at best even, simple, whole and with integrity.

I think the prophet Daniel, from which our first reading is taken, is instructive for us on this point. One of the things about Daniel, or Belteshazzar, as he is renamed by the Babylonian King, is that he doesn't change who he is or who he worships for anyone. He, along with many others, are taken back to Babylon as prisoners of war. His talents and holiness are noticed by his captors, and he serves many kings but always stays true to Yahweh the real king in his life.

For example, in chapter one he refuses to eat food in the royal court, that according to Jewish law would defile him – the king allows him to be a vegetarian because it doesn't seem to affect his appearance or his strength. In chapter three he refuses to bow down and worship a Golden Image that King Nebuchadnezzar sets up. As such, he along with three companions are thrown into a fiery furnace but survive unscathed. Then in chapter six a royal ordinance is established that bans anyone in the kingdom praying to any God other than King Darius. Daniel continues to pray to Yahweh but is caught and thrown into the lion's den. However, having already convinced a previous king that vegetarianism is the way forward he also manages to convince the lions... and is found in the den the next morning without a scratch.

One of the things that we can do to prepare for advent is to take stock of our lives and our experience over the past year and pray that God would give it all a good stir. How can we be more like Daniel? The same person in every situation. True to our calling to follow Christ rather than bowing to all sort of things that draw our attention away from His kingdom of peace, unity and compassion. How can we become more even, stirred through, whole – the same person everywhere. Working on letting Christ be king in all of our lives. This is kingship that Pontius Pilate in our gospel cannot understand. Is Jesus a King or not?

For Jesus' authority has nothing to do with battle, coercion and domination. His authority is simply the authority of truth and perfect in its integrity, in its wholeness. He does not reign by threat or military domination or acquisition. His authority is not sustained by asking homage from others. He does not subject people to himself. He comes not to be served but to serve. *'The servant king'* as we will sing during Communion. His kingship is the victim of betrayal, torture, mockery and abandonment and yet His kingship is also the one whose first words on his appearing to the disciples after the resurrection are *'peace be with you'*.

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, suggests that when we speak of Jesus as Lord of lords or as King of kings or as King of all, we are really saying that Jesus is present and relevant in every time and in every place – inviting us to be his hands, feet, head, and heart in the here and now. Even in the most difficult and dark places, even in times of grief and pain, Jesus is present “as a point of creative protest” - challenging us to grow and change.^[1] In other words, there is no situation in which we cannot make the kingdom of God a reality. In each and every moment we have the opportunity to choose love over hate, peace over violence, a mindset of plenty over a mindset of scarcity, and reconciliation over division. Stir us up O Lord...give us strength to follow you in every area of our lives. Help us to choose your kingdom now and forever. Amen