

Christ the King Sunday – Sung Eucharist,

Jeremiah 23: 1-6, Colossians 1: 11-20 and Luke 23: 33-43

Preacher: Rev'd Folli Olokose, Kensington Area Director of Ordinands

Friends, it is such a joy and pleasure to be with you this morning. I want to start by expressing my appreciation for your support for Helen Rowland, who, through your encouragement, is now training to be a Priest in God's Church.

I also want to thank Mother Emma for her kind invitation. It is an honour and a privilege to be invited to speak on God's word on any occasion. Especially on this august occasion, as we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, in a church located close to earthly palaces and riches. As I drove here today, I was struck by the beauty and majesty of many of the buildings around here. Opulence is evident, speaking the language of power and success. And yet, inside these walls, here at St Mary's, we proclaim a King with no palace, no army, and no crown but thorns.

The feast itself is surprisingly recent. After the end of the First World War in 1918, there was a brief period of relative peace, but soon after, nationalism and dictatorship swept across Europe. In 1925, Pope Pius XI established a day to be celebrated as Christ the King. After many years, Anglicans later placed it at the end of the Church's year, just before Advent: before we kneel at the manger, we first kneel before the throne of the crucified King. It was a way for the Church to remind the world that Christ alone is Lord—not any nation, ideology, leader, or political party.

That message is just as urgent today. We live in a world — and a nation — uneasy with leadership. Trust is fragile, truth is contested, voices grow harsh. Political affiliation trumps justice and mercy. Prejudice and injustice reign over love and grace. Nationality seems supreme and reserved for a few, and strangers and foreigners have become persona non grata. Christ the King Sunday reminds us that no earthly power has the last word, and that absolute authority still looks like service, humility, and truth. This is especially important now more than ever, and this is the thrust of our Bible readings this morning.

Our first reading from Jeremiah speaks more to our time than we may realise at first. Jeremiah lived six centuries before Christ, in a nation falling apart. Its kings were corrupt, its priests complacent, its people weary and divided. He looked at those who claimed to lead and cried out: *"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!"* And then he dared to hope: *"I will raise up for David a righteous Branch... and he shall reign as king and deal wisely."* Jeremiah longed for a ruler who would gather rather than scatter, who would bring justice with mercy — a Shepherd-King.

Centuries after Jeremiah, the promised King appears — but not in splendour. On Calvary, between two criminals, hangs the Lord of heaven and earth. Above Him, a sign: *"This is the King of the Jews."* It was meant as mockery, but Luke knows it's the most profound truth. One criminal jeers. The other whispers, *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* And Jesus replies, *"Today you will be with me in paradise."* Even dying, He reigns — forgiving instead of condemning, welcoming instead of excluding. Here is kingship re-defined: power expressed through mercy, majesty through

compassion. Christ's kingdom is built not on fear, but on forgiveness. Not on domination, but on peace. This is our King, the Lord of all creation.

Today stands at the threshold between endings and beginnings. We look back in remembrance and gratitude; we look forward to Advent, the season of expectation and light. The candles soon to be lit here will remind us that even when the nights grow long, the King's light is near. The One who once wore thorns will one day wear a crown of light. But until that day, Christ the King challenges us. He asks: Whose kingdom do you serve? Are we shaped more by the noise of politics and culture than by the voice of the Shepherd? Do our words and our choices reveal His mercy, or our fear? To live under His reign means to live differently — to speak truth when it costs us, to defend the vulnerable when it's inconvenient, to love the neighbour who thinks differently, to choose hope when the world preaches despair. That is what it means to say, "*Thy kingdom come.*"

I want to end with five marks of the life of Christians who have accepted Christ as their King and follow the ways of His kingdom:

1: Obedience to Christ's Teachings: "*If you love me, keep my commands.*" (John 14:15)

Those who have accepted Christ as their king will obey His commands. His commands are that we should love the Lord our God with all our hearts, our minds and our bodies. And also love our neighbours as ourselves. This is so simple. Love, love and love. Do not discriminate, love everyone in His name, for He is the Lord of heaven and earth.

2: Transformation of Character: "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*" (Galatians 5:22–23) Those who have accepted Christ as their king will experience a transformation in their character.

Their life will be an example of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. They will be seen as peacemakers, lovers of concord, kind, compassionate and loving.

3: Surrender of Personal Will: "*Not my will, but yours be done.*" (Luke 22:42). Those who follow Christ as their King will also surrender their personal will to that of God. They will not be paying lip service to Thy will be done, but instead wholeheartedly submit to God's will. This is, of course, easier said than done. Each of us wants to follow our ways. Each of us wants to do what we like. But if we really accept Christ as our King, then we must surrender our wills and follow His alone.

4: Devotion in Worship and Prayer. "*Pray without ceasing.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

To love God and love our neighbours, having our character transformed and surrendering our wills is a task we cannot accomplish on our own. Hence, we must pray. As Saint Paul wrote, we must pray without ceasing. Prayer draws us closer to God and empowers us with all we need to be faithful followers of the Shepherd King.

5: Service and Compassion Toward Others: *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”* (Matthew 25:40). Those who have surrendered their lives to follow the way of Christ the King will live a life of service and compassion. Their lives will be for the service of God and others. They will not be half-hearted followers but will be totally committed to serving God and His people.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Christ the King does not call us to a throne we cannot reach — He comes to us where we are. He walks beside us in our weakness, strengthens us in our calling, and gently lifts our eyes to the hope of His kingdom. We do not follow a distant ruler but a Shepherd-King who knows His sheep by name and leads them with mercy. So as we leave this place today, may I encourage you: not to be afraid of the world you step back into. Christ reigns there too. He reigns in our conversations, in our workplaces, in our homes, in our doubts and in our hopes. My prayer for you, for this parish, and for our Church is simple: May Christ the King rule more fully in your hearts, in your habits, and in your daily life. May His Spirit shape you into people of courage, mercy, and peace. May His light guide your steps in these uncertain days. And may you know, deep within, that the King who hung on a cross now holds you in unfailing love. So let us go forth as citizens of His kingdom, steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and overflowing with the love that makes His reign visible in the world. And to Christ our King, be glory, dominion, and authority, now and forever. Amen.
