

Power Will Always Fail in Justice (John 18:33-37)

10:00am Holy Communion – 24th November 2024

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

Glory to you O Lord

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?’ Pilate replied, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’

Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’

This is the gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ

Today is the Feast of Christ the King - it's the end of the church's year. From next week it's Advent, the anticipation and realisation of our hope. Do keep an eye on the cast of Advent and Christmas services coming along.

In our readings today we have two pictures of judgement – the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. On the one hand is the worldly justice of Pontius Pilate, and on the other is the cosmic and awesome creation power of Almighty God and His Son.

Picture the scene in Pilate's offices, as the arrested Jesus is brought in. As John reminds us: **'Pilate entered his headquarters and summoned Jesus to stand before him'**. Yes, it's a courthouse, but **good justice is unlikely**. Then in the opening to the Book of Revelation we see Jesus again now entering into his *own* courthouse - **except, this will be the place of true justice**. Christ the King is seen in the Heavenly places, sitting at the right hand of God. In His hands are life and death. He is **'the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.'**

The illegal behaviour of people is a complex matter, so the law is complex, being a victim is complex, the work of interpretation, investigation and justice are all complex. If you thought that rules and regulations were a good answer to most of life's difficult situations, then just imagine *yourself* in the judgement seat. **What ethical or moral creeds or philosophies would guide your decisions?** Whatever, it will not be perfect. **Power will always fail in justice.**

The scope of Christ's rule also sets the scope of his Justice. As Christians we believe that Christ is the very word of God, in the beginning (as John's gospel so gloriously tells us). He is the **'ruler of the kingdom of the Earth'**, and yet he is **'coming in the clouds.'** **The**

scope of Christ's rule, and therefore his justice, is the entirety of creation. So, there is not a place in all Heaven and Earth, and across all time, in which His word does not apply, or is not felt in judgement. Remind yourselves of Revelation 1:4 - ['To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.'](#)

Surely the hope of Heaven brings a comfort of eternity for us who live faithful lives, but brings also the *fear of God* to the wicked who can never escape judgement. That is one reality of the Kingdom – there is no escaping His justice: God's judgement has no limits of time and place. Across all creation, it remains in the hands of God to apply His justice as He sees fit. And he shall.

Across all history, God has spoken in many and various ways: by promises and covenants of love, yet also *in the shaken mountains of his wrath*. If there are variations in the way that God's justice is applied, then it will be consistent with all he has said and done. Most especially, that concerns His love, grace and forgiveness.

We know that the judgement and punishment which is due upon all sinful lives is then withheld from the faithful, who believe that God sent his son (out of love) to take the judgement and punishment due to us. **All glory and thanks to God!**

But that is His graceful gift to us, not our right to claim. The wicked and unrepentant who deny Christ can expect no mercy. Yet even more harshly judged will be those who cloak themselves in a pretence of God's goodness and the love of Christ, in order to exploit the weak and the vulnerable. **You may know to what I refer.**

Power will always fail in justice.

There are times in our lives where we may look upon events and wonder where the justice of God has gone. Where is fairness in these things? But His justice has not gone. Take both comfort and fear in the comprehensive power of God across all time - in Heaven and on Earth: **'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'**

For Pontius Pilate, truth and justice were in his hands, according to the scope of his local rule. Here is the man who could ask **'what is truth?'** Did he get to decide? Apparently so. He was a Governor of the Roman Province of Judea – an official appointed to that area. His power was his jurisdiction.

There was a law, but like all laws and rules they must be interpreted and applied, hopefully fairly. **Power is Earthly responsibility which must be held with the grace and fear of God – which is where true justice finds its definition.** It suited Pilate politically to condemn an innocent man and release a murderer, because it was more convenient to do so. Earthly justice can fail – temporal life is not always fair. **Power will always fail in justice.**

So here is another good reason for your faith – that God's Heavenly rule is perfect and just and applies to all people. The alternative is the imperfect and sometimes corrupt judgements of self-interest and local convenience.

In these recent weeks we have been in the Kingdom season. Today is the last Sunday. Christ's Kingdom is over all things, here is his good and just rule in which perfect justice is found. The Church is part of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, therefore is under the same judgement as everyone else. In recent weeks those powerful seats at the top of the Church of England have been in the courtroom

themselves, judged from both within and without. **And so they should be too.**

I could give you a whole morning on safeguarding leadership and practice. Here in the parish context, it's about *protect and prevent*. The vast majority of what comes under the title is about working well in our groups and ministries, where we might find vulnerabilities or difficulties.

Over 60 people have statutory DBS checks and safeguarding training of many different kinds. All of that has to be maintained, refreshed and renewed. There are lots of risk assessments. But don't understand me wrong. It's not merely a set of administrative and procedural matters. Its much more human than that.

Safeguarding is a culture lived in the same Christian sense as what it means to care. To be *safe* is a thing we are, not a checklist of things we need to get done. Safeguarding is part of our culture. Yes, there are checks in certain ways, but it's the *watchfulness* that makes for a good culture. **I don't often quote Elvis from the pulpit, but I so like the idea of a *suspicious mind*.**

The greater part of safeguarding practice is to be aware of signs and signals, and then to respond appropriately. **We do not get involved in case management.** We could be involved in victim support, because after all that is part of justice too, and part of our pastoral calling to care. Personally, I have considerable experience of victim support, but you will not know much about that because such care is necessarily kept private.

An ever-pervading culture of safeguarding is much more to be desired than the expletive reactions of just jumping when problems happen. Unfortunately, the very occasional (and very public) failure of safeguarding (such as we have seen) makes it easy to react only in soundbites and tactics, until the news media moves on. Truth gets handed over, like Christ to Pilate, into a jurisdiction which can then decide what to do for its needs, or perhaps even nothing at all.

Safeguarding is not perfect, and it never will be. **Power will always fail in justice.** Only the just and gentle rule of Christ is perfect. Across Heaven and Earth, God's judgement will always prevail in the end, and justice will ultimately be done.

Amen