



## Revd Ro's Reflection on Christ the King

**Revelation 1.4b-8**

**John 18.33-37**

Those of you who know me will know how much I enjoy watching the series, 'Lark Rise to Candleford'. There is a great deal of wisdom in it and I have used it in talks more than once! I was reminded of an episode as I looked at today's gospel passage of Christ before Pilate. In that episode one of the characters has been poaching and it leads to all sorts of trouble, he knows he has to come clean but as he sets out to tell the squire he is stopped by Robert who says, 'Alfie I aint got fingers enough on my hands to give blame for this.'

This Sunday is Christ the King Sunday and it ends the Kingdom Season. Next week is the first Sunday in Advent when we look forward to the coming of King Jesus at his incarnation but also, as we have seen over the last few weeks, to his second coming in God's new creation. The readings of course reflect this. We have moved from Mark's gospel to the gospel of John. Most of our readings have been leading up to this point, Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, now he stands before Pilate.

To an outsider looking at that scene, knowing nothing of the situation, all they would see at first glance would be a helpless prisoner before a hugely powerful man. On the surface that is the situation. The ultimate power was the governor's. Our creed states that Jesus 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate.' But thinking of those words from Lark Rise just who was to blame for this? Just who was responsible for bringing Jesus to this point? If you stop and think about it, the blame belongs to so many people. We have seen the jealousy, fear and spite of the powerful sects; the Pharisees and Sadducees and co, all of whom are out to trap him. Jesus is a threat to the power base of all the Jewish leaders. He was a threat to Herod, the puppet King. He was a threat to the Temple hierarchy. It was only a matter of time before he was arrested, under cover of darkness of course, because they feared the people and used Judas as a tool. But taking it a step further it is the responsibility of all who turned away from him, all those whose hosannas were to turn to cries for his blood.

<sup>18.3</sup> 'So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?'

He was taken to Annas and then the high priest Caiaphas where he was questioned. The Jews were under Roman authority, they wanted Jesus killed but they had no power to do that, legally only the governor could pass the death sentence. By taking him to Pilate they are being quite clear about the outcome they want.

'Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup>So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' <sup>30</sup> They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.'

It is typical that they are more concerned about ritual cleanliness and defilement than the murder of an innocent man, their long awaited Messiah. They are more concerned with the outward signs, the ritual of worship than truth and morality.

It is interesting to pause at this point to look at Pontius Pilate, just who was this man? If you asked most people the answer would be, 'The man who crucified Jesus,' but what do we know about him? Actually much of it is shrouded in mystery and legend. He may have been born in Scotland; his career was as either a soldier or politician. He was appointed governor in AD 32. He might be a governor but the province to which he was sent was a backwater of the Empire. It was not an easy place to be though, the Jews could be a troublesome lot and he knew it. Pilate's aim was to keep peace, to keep control at any price. He was an arrogant bully, cruel and heartless when he thought the occasion required it. He seemed to take delight in affronting the Jews. Actually expediency was the name of the game, if it suited the situation; if it suited him he would do it. That has little to do with justice and morality. The same could be said of the Jewish leaders. It suited them to have Jesus killed. By AD 37 we hear no more of Pilate.

So Jesus stands seemingly helpless before this all powerful man. But Jesus' demeanour, his words at this time are staggering. There are so many layers of meaning in this passage. To begin with Jesus knew exactly what was to happen, this was his destiny, and this was his commission. Jesus would give his life that we may live.

Pilate is coming at this from his perspective. Anyone who posed any kind of threat, who represented any sniff of rebellion, was to be squashed – no mercy. So obviously his first question is about power, politics and signs of rebellion.

<sup>33</sup> 'Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' <sup>35</sup> 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 rarely gives a straight answer and he doesn't now. His stature, his fearlessness, his nobility must have struck the governor during this time. Jesus gets to the heart of it. Pilate has no interest in him really, he would rather the Jews saw to this themselves, but if this man is saying he is a king then he is putting himself against Caesar and the political set up. No rebellion can be allowed.

Just look at Jesus' reply,

<sup>36</sup> 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.'

Sometimes people read this as, 'My kingdom is not of this world' that is absolutely wrong, the translation above is far better. To understand this, think of St. Paul's words 'be in the world not of it.' Kingship then and throughout much of history meant worldly power often leading to oppression. It meant control, it meant self-aggrandisement, it meant absolute rule brooking no opposition. This is Pilate's view of kingship. Jesus is a King; his kingdom is not simply spiritual and divorced from the world; it is in the world and it is of God. The contrast is brought out by Jesus when he says if it was from this world my followers would fight. Of course he has just prevented Peter from doing just that. His is the Kingdom of God which is brought to earth at the incarnation. This is the kingdom message that Jesus, during his ministry, has been taking throughout the land and that will be taken to the four corners of the globe. But it goes much further than this; this is God incarnate that stands before Pilate. This King is co-creator of all that is. How puny is Pilate before Jesus. Jesus is overturning the world order to establish God's way, God's rule.

<sup>37</sup> 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.'

Jesus is basically giving the message of God to Pilate who cannot begin to understand it. The stand points of both are polar opposites. Pilate sees dominion, might, majesty and power in earthly terms. For Jesus it is cosmic. Jesus is overturning the world order to establish God's way, God's rule.

Pilate thinks he holds all the power; actually, as Jesus is to say later, 'You would have no power over me at all unless it were given you from above.' Jesus is completing God's work in obedience to him. Pilate is no fool though and he is well aware that Jesus is no threat to the Empire. He knew jolly well that the reason Jesus stands there is that the Jewish leaders are jealous and fearful. Pilate has also been affected by Jesus, 'he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him.'

Jesus has just said, '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.' Jesus is bringing the truth of God, the kingdom of God is close to humanity, Jesus is their king, Jesus is truth he holds the words of life.

Pilate simply is blind and that is shown by the words, 'What is truth.' For him the truth is what is expedient at the time. That is a warning to our society who sadly often sees through these eyes.

Yes Jesus is the King of the Jews and when Pilate nails that mocking proclamation on the cross he cannot see the irony of it. Jesus is King of creation, Calvary is his throne and here is fought a cosmic battle. Sin and evil is defeated by love and salvation is won for humanity. Jesus is bringing in God's new creation and at the perfection of this order he will come again to rule in triumph.

The book of Revelation is apocalyptic, that is, 'the sudden revealing of previously hidden truths.' John, known as the Divine, not the St John of the Gospel or epistle, is using a Jewish convention, where 'holy or prayerful people were wrestling with divine purpose.'

<sup>1.9</sup> 'I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.'

It was a letter written to the seven churches in Western Turkey and beyond, <sup>4</sup>'John to the seven churches that are in Asia:' Jesus is seen as the central one, the king of all, Jesus is where earth and heaven are one. These writings try to lift the veil between heaven and earth, to reveal God's purpose. In the introduction to his letter John makes it quite clear that it is Jesus who is the central figure.

<sup>1</sup>'The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup>who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.'

What John writes is from God, from Jesus via the angel that reveals it. Jesus is the King of Kings.

'Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.'

Jesus freed us from sin, he won salvation for humanity but he left a commission. All Jesus' followers are baptised into the holy priesthood of all believers,

'To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

As followers of Jesus we have a commission, to take that good news to all people, to live as Christ would have us live and if necessary face persecution but remain loyal to the King. As we read the next part we cannot help but think of the Advent hymn, 'Lo he comes with clouds descending;' it is of course based on this passage.

<sup>7</sup> 'Look! He is coming with the clouds;  
every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail

John is referring to Jesus' coming in glory at the end time when God will bring in his perfected order and Jesus will reign as King. Once again we have the description,

<sup>8</sup> 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is like saying, 'I am' it is inclusive of all that is and is to come. Jesus is the King whose throne was Calvary, who vanquished death at the resurrection. Jesus is the King who intercedes with his Father and who will come again in glory.

*'Alleluia, Christ appears on earth to reign'* Charles Wesley.

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