

Annual Report of the Rector

All Saints, Bearsden, 2023-24

Readings: Daniel 7.9-10,13-14; Revelation 1.4b-8; John 18.33b-37

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Today we reach a triumphant end to our journey through the year from last Advent Sunday to this Feast of Christ the King. Through the year we've been hearing the stories about Jesus and his life among us. Our journey has taken us through many different landscapes.

There've been the open plains of day to day life in ordinary times when we've heard the extra-ordinary stories of what Jesus said, how he healed the sick and reached out to the most unlikely members of society.

There've been shadowy valleys of temptation, betrayal and death on the cross. Wilderness times of despair and devastating suffering. There've been mountain tops of breath-taking excitement: resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

For a while now the scenery around us has been that of the Kingdom of God and the imminent return of Christ as King and Judge and now we've reached this, the highest peak on our journey. From here we can look back and see where we've travelled and how all the paths were always leading to this place even if it didn't always seem so at the time.

Because we have this vision of Christ as King we are inspired and empowered to return next week to the starting point and begin the journey again. Next week it'll be Advent Sunday and we'll begin again to prepare the way of the Lord.

Next year, like this year, we'll each be on our own journey. We, too, will walk through plains of ordinary day to day living, through our own valleys of shadow and up to our own high places of good news, joy and excitement. There'll be times in the journey when we'll get lost or discouraged, confused or stuck and those are the very times when we'll need this vision of Christ the King to give purpose and meaning to our journey just as it gives purpose and meaning to the Church's journey of faith.

Of course it's the perfect springboard for us on a day on which we are holding our annual church meeting. In England annual meetings tend to be just after Easter so the message is often one of new hope, and walking forward in the Resurrection power of Jesus. But here in Scotland we are encouraged to have annual meetings on this final Sunday of the church year.

So not only do we look ahead to what could be, we also look back to what has been. We give thanks for every single person who has contributed in any way to the life of our church – to our Vestry, to all of our congregation, to our choir and organist Esther, to Janet for keeping our magazine informative and interesting to those who have helped take services, and especially Kevin Francis, for whom we are grateful for so much help and support and cover of services.

Our annual report looks at many of the facts and figures but doesn't necessarily reflect all the hard work done by so many in so many ways – from cleaning to committee work, from assisting up front to helping behind the scenes, from setting things up to clearing stuff away, from taking the lead to taking the bins out. Once you start to thank individuals you are bound to leave somebody out, so can I just thank everyone for making our church journey interesting, fresh and smooth during the past year.

If we spend time looking at the annual reports for the past year, which generally give an informative and encouraging picture of our life at All Saints, I hope we can see just how much we have achieved. It's all too easy to concentrate on the negative, or things we ourselves might not like, yet it is clear that we have to be able to offer variety, to be relevant, exciting and interesting to a wide variety of people within our community and beyond, to whom we reach out in God's name.

And that must continue in the days and weeks and months ahead. It would be good to build on our *Generous Giving Generous Living* initiative not just thinking about stewardship of time, talents, energy and resources but also about developing a life of prayer – it is so good we are able to hold a weekly prayer meeting on Wednesdays for instance.

And we really do want to be able to offer activities for young people (in fact I am involved in conversations with other local churches even now about working together in this area) and doing more in social and fundraising activities. All of this needs people to offer support of course and that means more than cheering from the sidelines.

Today is a perfect time to reflect, recharge batteries and not only offer thanks but also offer encouragement as we step forward into another year. And we remember to trust God and never give up, each of us sharing in the responsibility of building up our church of All Saints. We pray, pray and pray again and we actively listen to what God is calling us to do. We dare to hope and dream. But we do so understanding that we have a role to play in making God present for the current generation as well as for all those that follow.

So rather than just coming along to services or other events we have to be people of vision and hope. But what sort of vision of Christ the King can give us the comfort, encouragement and motivation to keep going when the going gets tough?

We heard this morning of Daniel's weird and wonderful vision. He sees a figure he calls "Ancient One" or Ancient of Days, a heavenly King, who takes his throne among many thrones. This is a King who will inspire love, faithfulness and devotion from his followers without force or threat of punishment for desertion?

In John's gospel we see that this King is nothing like the kings of this world and his power is not the sort of power this world understands. Jesus was right. If his kingship belonged in this world his followers would have fought to defend him and to bring down the occupying forces. Our world cries out for a different sort of kingship, a different sort of power and a different way of being together.

This King came not to establish a political sovereignty but to bear witness to the truth of God's reign in the Kingdom of Heaven which is not of this world. But for now this king is in this world and in this world he faces the same injustices, dangers, threats and suffering that we all face.

Our east window (currently being cared for, repaired and maintained) depicts the risen Christ. He is dressed in a splendid red robe – a kingly figure. But there is no throne on which a king may sit, just a cross to which this king was nailed. There is no heavily jewelled crown but a crown of thorns which hurt and drew blood when it was pressed down on his head. There is no one gold ring of power for his finger but nails which were hammered through his flesh. The window is a reminder that the victory of love over death was won only after much suffering. But it is a reminder, a proclamation that love does have that victory over death.

Jesus is the Son of Man, who carries the marks of whips, thorns and nails. But he is also Christ the King who reigns over all in his eternal kingdom. And if Christ the King is also a Son of Man then so too is Christ the Judge of all and his judgment will be shown with the mercy and compassion of one who understands from experience what it is to be human. When we tell him the story of our lives we will find ourselves loved, accepted and healed.

From there we'll be able to look back over our lives and see that all the paths were always leading to this place even though there were times when it didn't seem like that. Until then we can know that God's love, acceptance and healing is among us now.

Christ the King is still Jesus, the Son of Man who walks with us and reaches out to us with hands which still bear the marks of suffering. Christ the King has been with us throughout our journey this year. Christ the King will go with us on our journey through next year.

Today as we celebrate this eternal presence of Christ the King in bread and wine let us pray that his spirit will bring us refreshment, peace and whatever else our hearts need for the journey that lies ahead.

I'm going to end with an oft-used quote that is said to have been dedicated to French poet Guillaume Apollinaire if not actually written by him. I think it brings one year to an end nicely as well as preparing us in Bearsden as we continue our journey with Christ from Advent to Christ the King next year.

*"Come to the edge," he said.
"We can't, we're afraid!" they responded.
"Come to the edge," he said.
"We can't, We will fall!" they responded.
"Come to the edge," he said.
And so they came...
And he pushed them...
And they flew."*

Rev'd David

Sunday, November 23rd, 2024 (report delivered as sermon in morning service)