

Sermon preached by Rev Carole Barnet – Feast of Christ the King
25th November 2018
John 18: 33-37

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

As many of you know, we go into school each week to lead worship. It can be quite nerve-racking as the children often ask questions that adults seem afraid to ask and, yet, such questions bring us so much closer to God. Last week, we were invited into Year 3 to talk about our vocational journeys and why we wanted to become Priests! The truth is that being Ordained is not like wanting to become a Doctor or a Teacher or an Architect or anything else for that matter. It is rather a question of listening to God calling us and then either answering or not. As we tried to explain this to the class, as ever, one little boy put up his hand and asked a really good question – “How do you hear God”?! – and that is a *really* good question.

Today’s Gospel reading from John is also about asking really good questions.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, the joyful culmination of the church year, when we reflect on the Kingship of Jesus. In today’s passage, Pilate is trying to trip Jesus up by asking tricky questions which Jesus answers by saying: “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”.

So, what is the truth? And, how **do** we **hear** God? These are the questions for us today.

Most of us will never have met, or even seen a king (or a queen) in real life but, if asked, I imagine we would describe kingship of this world to be about majesty and riches, and possibly about power and authority. And, I don’t think I am exaggerating to say that we live in a world where *Me* is very often *that* king; where the powerful demand loyalty; where the strong feel free to suppress the weak; and where the rich make themselves richer, at the expense of the poor. It can be difficult not to be driven by our own agenda and needs. I know I often fall short of putting others first and myself last and I am sure others do also. But, this is not a reflection of the Kingship of Jesus.

So, what kind of king is Jesus? His Kingship is not about the kind of power or authority that this world understands. Jesus is a very different sort of king, he is a meek King, humble and compassionate; a King who came to serve, not to be served. And he wants us to worship him.

The *truth* is that people do not respond to despots, tyrants, bullies other than through fear. But this is not the way of the Kingdom of which Jesus is King. The Kingdom ruled by Christ the King of Peace, is the way of Love, a Kingdom to which Jesus calls us into union with him in the love that comes from God the Father.

And the *truth* is that we are called to respond and follow the example of Christ. The invitation of the Gospel is to pour out our lives in service, in humility, peace and love.

But, for us to follow and serve Christ, we have to learn to hear his call, to listen to that voice of Love that speaks, not to power, but to compassion; not to self-interest, but to generosity and care for others; not to be served but to serve.

To come back to the little boy's question (and, if we are honest, often our own question too) - how **do** we **hear** his voice, especially against the competing voices we hear in our lives?

The answer is through prayer. Prayer allows us to open our hearts to receive God's Love. As we said to the children, God is everywhere and we can find Him and hear Him everywhere. But we should not assume this necessarily comes as a voice from the clouds. God's Love often reveals itself in other ways, in imaginative ways. For example, God might break into our lives through the sight of a beautiful garden or a distant mountain view, or something we read, or an inviting aroma, through listening to music or through taking the dog for a walk. The important thing is that we make time and space for this to happen; to make time and space to allow us to really listen *attentively, devoutly* for that voice speaking within our very souls.

Earlier this month, I went away on a silent retreat where I had no social interaction with anybody else as I sought to engage more deeply with God. At first, I admit, this was tough but the weather was fine so I took myself out for long walks. Much to my surprise, I found myself closest to God, not necessarily when I was reading the Bible or in Chapel or when meditating on the Gospel for the day, but when I wandered alone along the beach. As I took in the sights and sounds around me – the clouds floating across the sky, the waves crashing against the shore, the seagulls calling high above, I really sensed God's presence deep within my soul. I could feel His Love all around. I was filled with a deep peace and joy and I wanted to worship Him there and then. *This* is hearing the voice of God. *This* is opening our hearts through prayer - to hear God's voice is by sensing the voice of Love calling to the very depths of our hearts. When do *you* feel closest to God? When do *you* feel far away from God?

The *truth*, pure and simple, is that God is Love and God is speaking to you in love right now. God's invitation to us is to listen attentively, to listen devoutly, and to know the truth of His Love. On this day of joy as we celebrate Christ the King, come and follow Jesus – worship him, serve him and testify to that truth by living by his example in love, peace and joy with all people.

Amen.