

Sunday next before Advent: Christ the King

26 November 2017

St Andrew's Church, Cobham

Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24; Ephesians 1.15-end; Matthew 25.31-end

The strange journey

Today is a very happy day, as we prepare to baptize X and Y into the family of Christ.

It's a very happy day.

But when you stop to think about it, it's also a rather strange day. It's a day when we recognize that we are all on a strange and wonderful journey.

It all starts with a glimpse of a man.

There you are, just getting on with the ups and downs of life, perhaps struggling a little, when a figure moves into your field of vision.

So you look up, and over there, in the distance, is a man. It looks at first glance like he is just some sort of wandering teacher, with some nice things to say about how to be good.

But there is something about him. Perhaps he irritates you – all that stuff about dying for you and rising again: who needs it? Perhaps you start to think he may have something useful to say in your time of trouble. And so you take a couple of steps closer to get a better look.

Then a funny thing happens. Instead of the easy answer you wanted, you find that the closer you get to him, the stranger he becomes. Then it dawns on you why. It's because he is standing at the border between two worlds, and he seems to have a foot in both.

And the really strange and scary thing is that he is holding out his hand and saying, 'Come. Step over the border with me. This is where you belong. It's OK. All you have to do is let go of everything else you know, and trust me. I've done all the hard work of dying on a cross, so that the path across this border is free and open.'

The pull is strong. But you need to know more before you take his hand and take that step across the border.

So you start to listen a bit more carefully and you realize he is telling you things about himself, and giving you image after image to help you understand who he is.

I am like a shepherd, he says, one who loves his sheep so much that he will die to protect them from evil (John 10.9).

I am like bread, he says, bread that once eaten will take away the longing and hunger in your soul for ever (John 6.35).

I am the light, he says, a great, warm light that will keep the darkness far away from you (John 8.12).

I will give you rest, he says. If you are weary and burdened, come to me (Matthew 11.28).

I am the Son he says, the Son of the one true Father, and if you come to me, the Father will race out to meet you and take you in his arms and kiss you (Luke 15.20).

And all these pictures show this strange man to be a being of such love, such goodness, such power and such sacrifice, that there is really only one thing to do, and that is to let go of everything else, take that outstretched hand, and step with him across the border into a new world.

If you are here today, in this church, it probably means that you are somewhere on that strange journey. For X and Y, it is through their baptism that they will reach out and take this strange man's hand, and cross the border with him into the new world, where they will be new people, people who are protected, fed, surrounded by light, and given rest, a place where they will feel the Father's arms around them and his kiss on their forehead.

But the journey does not end there. As we cross that border, we find that everything this strange man said is true. But there is another promise, a final destination that awaits us all.

This man who takes us across the border out, it turns out, is a king.

One day, like children holding his hand, we will look up and see that his shabby cloak has been transformed into glorious clothes, and all things have been laid at his feet. And then we will look at ourselves and discover that we have been transformed into the brothers and sisters of a king (Matthew 12.50), a king who will look down at us with love and say: 'My brother, my sister, don't be surprised,

for you have trusted me, and walked with me and shared in my suffering; now come - share with me in my glory (Romans 8.30).'

May God protect and bless us all on our strange journey.

Amen.