

Christ the King 2024, Year B, Proper 16, 24 November

Readings: Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14, Revelation 1.4b-8, Psalm 93, John 18:33-37

“O Thou who art unchangeable, whom nothing changes!... Thou art [also] moved, and moved in infinite love, by all things.... the need of a sparrow, even this moves Thee; and what we so often scarcely notice, a human sigh, this moves Thee.... But nothing changes Thee.... O Thou who in infinite love dost submit to be moved, may this our prayer also move Thee to add Thy blessing...to bring [us] into conformity with Thy unchangeable will, Thou who art unchangeable!”
Amen. (Søren Kierkegaard, 1813-1855)

Thursday I woke to startling news in what I would call out as misplaced values. A piece of art auctioned by Sotheby's in New York sold for 5.2 million US dollars before tax. There is nothing unusual about works of art being sold for astronomical sums. The most expensive paintings sell for well over 60 million US dollars before tax on the open market. The art work I am referring to is entitled 'Comedian'. It is the work of the artist Maurizio Cattelan (born 1960). It consists of a yellow banana, which is beginning to turn brown taped to a white canvas by a piece of grey duct tape. I grant you the so-called work of art is clever as it calls into question our Western liberal values, in which and through which many are losing their bearings. A more generous interpretation of the artist's intention might be to posit it is a reminder to each of us to see art in the everyday.

My interest piqued I watched the auction as bidding began at 800,000 US dollars which was already extravagant, a ridiculous price. It was entertaining, but also deeply troubling to see the art world at work. To me it appeared as an artificial and blotted world full of self-importance. People having too much money with oodles to spare. The auction as an event and the price fetched contrasted with the activity I was involved in twelve hours earlier. The previous day I attended an ecumenical service of prayer in the Michaelerkerche. It was a prayer service

for Christians being persecuted or discriminated against for their confession of Christ as Lord and Saviour. Additionally on Saturday a morning a news item reported that occult and satanic symbols at an event being sponsored by the city of Basel will be permitted, but Christian symbols banned.

On my journeys I have visited Israel, Turkey and Egypt, countries where I know Christians suffer discrimination and in Egypt and Turkey are persecuted. The increase of Christian Indians leaving the subcontinent over recent years highlights how Modi and the form of Hinduism he espouses has little room for Christians, Muslims or Sheikhs. One of the great sadnesses of my lifetime is to have seen the depopulation of the Near and Middle East of its ancient Christian presence often aided by the West. I remember well when Franz Scharl now one of the suffragan bishops of the archdiocese of Vienna and then a parish priest came to see me saying I/we weren't doing enough for Anoosh and his wife, Iranians who had fled Iran because they were being discriminated. Anoosh and his wife in the end emigrated to the US where they have built up a life.

The above is a rather long preamble to our keeping of the Feast of Christ the King, which Gabe explained a few years ago is a 20th century innovation instituted by Pope Pius XI (1857-1939) in 1925 to remind Christians that their loyalty belongs to Christ and God's sovereignty. These are paramount. Being an old school Anglican I didn't think we needed another day to affirm God's sovereignty in Christ over all things as this is more than adequately expressed in the Feast of the Ascension (too little observed by Christians) in which we already celebrate Christ as the ascended, glorified Lord enthroned over all creation. And that is for that reason we today sing Ascension hymns on this the Feast of Christ the King.

But let's make something of Ascension Day and Christ the King as they stand side by side given that Christ the King has made its way into our Anglican calendar against the backdrop of the 20th century and its world wars, where on two occasions 'Christian' Europe *lost it* [slang] dragging the rest of the world into conflict. Christ the King is static to my mind. Here it is. God is sovereign, Lord over all things, but it is only through the process of walking with the earthly Christ that we begin to grasp (have an inkling of) what Christ as King actually means and entails for the Christian in the process discovering the nature of God and the cost.

Being a Christian is not static (a solidity), but rather always dynamic enlivened each and every day by following Christ meeting with other Christians by and through the operation of the Holy Spirit working in us, the abiding in Christ. Given what I have just said please nurture your Christian friendships. Do not neglect your Christian friends. If you have no Christian friends make some. Turning our attention to the majestic stained-glass window with Christ as King and High Priest will hopefully help make the point. This is the stasis of which I speak. The unchangeable. God is. And there is a deep truth in this. But the window fails in one important aspect. It cannot show us how faith is alive and active, dynamic. Subject to the ups and downs, time in flux, in what we call history and which to interrupt is so very, very difficult. Life is not static. It is vibrant. It is forever changing. Our window does not really show the cost of the Way of the Incarnation. It is a Way. The first Christians were known as people of the Way. A way that leads to a life with God, the way to eternal life. (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)

There were other ways in the ancient world that of the Stoics and the Epicureans to name two. Both are attractive and have much to teach us. Is it the case that we who know ourselves to be Christians need to learn how to own being a Christian, a follower of Christ, indwelling us, unapologetic about following a way? A good way. A way we can commend. A way to live by. At *Soundings* on Tuesday we briefly touched on the life of St Francis of Assisi, who in his response to Christ pioneered a radical way of being Christian, as he followed Christ in the way in 13th century. In the Franciscan rule we read, "The Rule and life of the Minor Brothers is this, namely, **to observe** the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without property and in chastity." We today should first **observe** the Good News of the life of Christ in minutiae not unlike Francis did. The stations on the way they are many, from lowly birth to Lord on high. Paul writes of Christ crucified, but Him risen. We watch and pray with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. We stand at the foot of the Cross on Golgotha. We weep with Christ for all the cities of the world called to be cities of peace. We mourn with Christ for loved ones who are no longer with us this side of eternity, but are not without hope. We look with Christ from the cross as he surveys the world as the crucified one. It includes today the auction room at Sotheby's in New York. The Jesus perspective from the cross is memorably captured in Scorsese's 1988 film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

It is by observing, embarking on the way that we learn what it means that Christ is King, the King of all our lives and of all Creation. To him we look for the Way that leads from death to life in the now. It will include renunciation, as it has always done. It will include inspiration, as it has always done. It will require patience and faithfulness, as it has always done. It will require humility, as it has always done. We won't be spared the challenges that life brings. We will all be

tested in different ways, but we will know we are not alone for God is with us. This is the truth of which Jesus speaks.

Pilate asks, What is truth? John the Evangelist writes in the prologue, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1.14) And Jesus in John tells us as he makes his way to the cross that truth is found in Him Jesus. May we be sanctified (soaked in) in the truth (John 17.17) that is Jesus, the living Word of God, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life learning and knowing that it is through Him that we come to God the Father. (John 14.6)

I return to the auction room in New York and the auction of *‘The Comedian’*, which achieved 5.2 million before taxes and which I have set alongside the Crucified Saviour King. The contrast is jarring and disturbing... This juxtaposition this ‘Gegenüberstellung’ unmasks our present condition. I would laugh out loud at the collective folly, if it weren’t obscene to do so.

As those from Christ Church know we are in the midst of a stewardship campaign aspiring to put our community on a sound financial footing and to extend our ministry. At the heart of a stewardship campaign is not first and foremost about how much am I prepared to give. Rather it asks a question about our values and what is important to us as individuals. It also asks the same question of us as a Christian community. Let’s say it costs 250,000 euros a year to make sure we meet all our obligations as a church in Vienna, which has at the heart the mission to maintain, to uphold, to strengthen Christians as we continue to seek in and through Christ to bring people to Him baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that together we may walk in the Way of the

Incarnation. With the 5.2 million plus at Sotheby's we could fund at least 20 new Christian communities. We could fund 70 priests and so on. At Christmas we may want to shower our loved ones with presents, but let us seek a better way and shower them with the Love of Christ Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, who shows us and challenges us to a Life worth living. **Amen.**