

Corona Season (22.11.20)
Christ the King

ACCEPTING CHRIST AS OUR KING

*Christ is the king, O friends rejoice!
Brothers and sisters, with one voice,
let the world know he is your choice. Alleluia!*

What does it mean to accept Christ as our king? We're fortunate in having such a good example of kingship in the Queen. A good king is someone to whom you give your allegiance, under whose rule you live, whose example you follow, and to whom you look for protection. Accepting Christ as our king is to give him our allegiance, let his values rule our life, and to follow his example.

How do we do this? One person who wanted to know the answer was Nicodemus, the man who came to Jesus by night. He said to Jesus that the signs he performed showed that God was with him. Jesus 'hears' the unspoken need behind the compliment: Nicodemus is really asking, 'What do these signs mean?' Jesus replies that no one can see the kingdom of God unless they have been born again.

There are two phrases in Jesus' reply that we need to think about. First, 'kingdom of God' - it suggests a kind of state, like the UK, but that's not quite the idea; it's too static. The Greek word translated 'kingdom' has a more dynamic sense; 'kingly rule' conveys the sense better: dynamic and transformative. The other phrase, 'born again' has acquired a particular meaning these days implying a particular experience of charismatic renewal; 'born from above' better conveys the sense of Jesus' reply. So, Jesus says to Nicodemus, he needs to open himself to the Spirit of God so that he can see things as God sees them. Jesus isn't talking about entering a physical realm, but about entering a spiritual realm, and gaining true insight. This is what the

gift of the Spirit is all about: allowing the kingly rule of God to shape your life.

This was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians: 'I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe...'

Living with 'the eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know the hope to which you are called.' That speaks to me. It's a lovely description of living in the Spirit. The heart is the symbol of our true self, our whole person; what's in our heart makes us who we are; our heart is where our treasure is.

Paul's prayer implies a spiritual journey. He would have been the first to stress that there is nothing magical or automatic about the gift of the Spirit. Some people, like him, might experience the truth about Jesus in one life-changing, blinding flash, but the process of actually converting one's life, the deeper conversion of attitudes, habits and values, is a much longer process, and was so even for Paul himself. After his conversion he spent several years preparing for his ministry during which time he came to understand the deeper truth of what it meant to accept Christ as his king. The Spirit is like a seed planted in the earth and it requires care and nurture to make it grow. A good way to do this is to follow a simple rule of life.

We may chafe at the idea, but nothing worthwhile in life is achieved without a bit of discipline, and that is especially true of the spiritual life. The Emmaus Course (similar to *Alpha*) suggests that to grow as a Christian we need to be serious about four things:

- **Worship:** joining in the celebration of the Eucharist Sunday by Sunday. *Christ feeds us with his heavenly food.*

- **Prayer:** setting aside time each day for private prayer. *Christ guides us and helps us to trust him.*
- **Bible:** taking time to study the Bible so that we see things through God's eyes. *Christ enlightens us with his truth.*
- **Service:** undertaking some practical service in the community; taking up a ministry within the church; and seeing our paid work as a vocation. *Christ uses our hands to build the Kingdom.*

The process of spiritual growth is a combination of grit and grace. Paul constantly reminded his converts that growing in the faith required effort, especially in moral reform. His language to the Galatians uses powerful symbols: they must crucify their lower nature, putting to death all within them that fights against the Spirit; only then would they bring forth the harvest of the Spirit: 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.' (*Galatians 5.22*) But in this we are not alone. Conversion is enabled by grace, and, as Paul explained to the Romans, the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.

We do not even know how we ought to pray, but through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us and God who searches our inmost being knows what the Spirit means, because he pleads for God's own people in God's own way; and in everything, as we know, he co-operates for good with those who love God and are called according to this purpose. (*Romans 8.26b-28*)

Learning to give the Spirit space to work in our lives is perhaps the essence of being born from above. Do we want to glimpse the kingdom? then, this is the way.

*So shall God's will on earth be done
New lamps be lit, new tasks begun,
And the whole Church at last be one. Alleluia!*

To Christ our king be the glory now and for ever. Amen.