

Revelation 1:4b-8

4 Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,

5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,

6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

John 18:33-37

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

Every eye will see Him

Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

This week in the church year is known as Christ the King, and all the lectionary readings today pick up on this idea. As time went on, the early church became increasingly aware of exactly who Jesus the rabbi from Nazareth really was, and Revelation in particular emphasises his Kingship over the whole earth and not just the people who happen to believe in Him.

And so both our readings are pushing the point. That He, Jesus, is the alpha and omega, the beginning and end of all things.

Too often we get tangled up in discussion about complicated ideas like the Trinity and miss the central fact that if we want to understand what God is like, we only need to look at Jesus.

The encounter with Pilate is very revealing about how the wider world tries to deal with all of this. Initially there's acceptance that on one level he's fairly harmless. Pilate doesn't really know what Jesus has done to upset everyone. “*Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you've done?*” There doesn't seem to him to be an identifiable crime. To those today too, who feel that God is a bit of an airy fairy concept, it's all a bit irrelevant. How could it possibly have any relevance for the real world? Christianity has been dismissed some time ago as any kind of solution to our problems, and I think it might just be down to a completely new generation to look at it without that bias.

The world sees the church as part of a veneer of respectability but I don't think it's believed any more. And statements like "My kingdom is not of this world" will be used to back this up. Politicians tell the church to stay off their patch and stick to moral issues, although morality has ironically now become central to the whole political discussion. Meanwhile people have moved on to more interesting religions, like football.

Pilate however latches on to the word 'kingdom'. "You're a king then are you?" This is a concept he understands. But kings gain power through violence and war. Herod the Great, 30 years before, about the time Jesus was born, had defeated the Parthians, and Rome had graciously allowed him to be 'the King of the Jews'. This obscure rabbi did not fit that profile at all, he preached love, so he couldn't be a threat, hence a sign could safely be placed on Jesus's cross, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. And when he was challenged that actually he should put it in quote marks as just a claim of the preacher and not a fact, Pilate said 'what I have written, I have written'. And he washed his hands of the responsibility. Maybe Pilate understood the deeper meaning after he met Jesus face to face. It must have had an impact on him. As Tom Wright points out, 'Jesus kingdom is not *from* this world but it is *for* this world. As I've said before, Jesus never intended to start a religion, because religion is more often than not something provided as an escape from reality. The reason Jesus is dangerous is that he challenges us to face up to reality.

His heart is for the poor, but he also knew, and said, that the poor will always be with us. As long as people's hearts are far from God these problems can't be eradicated.

Jesus said, "You say that I'm a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

The truth is often too uncomfortable. What is the reality of the man John calls 'the ruler of the kings of the earth'?

Tom Kennar, vicar of Havant, says this: John...offers us a broken and beaten messiah, on his knees before a living symbol of worldly power, Pontius Pilate. Jesus before the Imperial Throne is...stripped of all authority, and willingly surrendering his power to control what happens next.

So the power and authority of the kingdom of Jesus is contained within a life of sacrificial love, the complete opposite of what the world expects, and cannot understand without surrendering to the truth of its own brokenness. And he really does offer life hope and peace of mind. Here to end is the image of Jesus the Son of Man given by the Old Testament prophet Daniel:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Amen