

Today is the last Sunday before Advent begins, the last Sunday of the church year and has been recognised as the Sunday when we focus on Christ the King.

Before we get stuck into our passages for today, we need to focus a bit on exactly what this means. We live in a country with a queen, so we are part of a monarchy, but ours is what's known as a "Constitutional Monarchy", so the monarch's powers are defined in a constitution. Queen Elizabeth does not actually have all that much power and is mainly a figurehead of national unity. Most of the political power in the UK is actually in the government and not with the Queen.

What we need to remember though is that Kings in biblical times were not constitutional monarchs, but absolute monarchs. They *were* the power, there was no one that could tell them what they must do. They had the ability to make what laws they wanted and they were the final word in justice. There was no appealing a judgement made by the King.

While the Feast of Christ the King is relatively recent, having been instituted in 1925, the idea of Christ as king is present in various places in the bible. Right from his birth when the magi came and asked "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews?" (Mat 2:2), through his trial before Pilate where Pilate refers to him as "king of the Jews" (Jn18:39) and even had it written on a notice attached to Jesus' cross (Jn 19:19). The early church also recognised his rule with the phrase "King of kings, and Lord of lords" being used about Jesus in 1 Timothy (6:15) and in Revelation (17:14).

By declaring that Jesus is the King of kings, we are saying that Jesus is the one with the absolute power over the humans that have absolute power. There is no-one greater.

It's this idea of supreme authority that Paul is expressing in our first reading from Ephesians. "Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers and lords; he has a title superior to all the titles of authority in this world and the next. God put all things under Christ's feet" (Eph 1:21-22).

We said that King of kings implies absolute power over the humans with absolute power, but Paul actually goes further. He tells us that Jesus has absolute power over not just humans, but heaven. He rules above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers and lords. In a time when multiple gods were recognised, with each country having their own god or gods, this statement is a declaration that Jesus is above them all. As all powerful as the gods appeared, Jesus has total power over them.

This is particularly important to remember at the moment. It feels like the world has gone out of control. The corona virus pandemic appears to be unstoppable. The restrictions just keep on coming. Despite all this, we have to remember that Jesus is in charge. We might not understand why he is allowing this; we might want to tell him that there must be a better way. But whatever else we may think, we must hold onto this truth of his authority.

I was trying to get my head around this idea of not understanding and I thought that it might be similar to Egypt in the time of Joseph. God had spoken to Pharaoh through Joseph giving warning of a famine that was 7 years in the future. Pharaoh, an absolute monarch responsible to no one, responding to that warning starts collecting in grain, presumably building extra granaries to hold what was needed. What did the everyday, working Egyptian make of this? The harvests were good, but they were not being allowed to make a profit from the extra, they were being forced to hand it over to Pharaoh. Not only that, but they were being made to build extra granaries to store it. You can imagine that there would have been a certain amount of grumbling about this, asking what Pharaoh thought he was doing.

I wonder whether, 7 years later, they understood. Looking back at what had appeared to be tough

restrictions with realisation that it had been for the best since they had food when the harvests failed. That understanding only came afterwards, in the case of the Egyptians, 14 years of hindsight later.

Pharaoh was working for the good of his country and made decisions which got them through 7 years of famine. We are assured by Paul in Romans that “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (8:28). However tough things appear, we have this to hold onto as well together with his absolute power.

Believe me, I know how it feels when things are tough. Half way through my training I had got to the stage of thinking I could not cope. Work was running me ragged, the essays required by the course were longer and required more research. I had just reached my limit. With the support of Sarah and Caleb, the tutor, fellow students and the congregations in our church I got through. Looking back, again hindsight being great, I think that it was God showing me that with him I could do things that on my own I couldn't. At the time though I just wanted to throw in the towel.

So as I finish, I want to encourage us all. Jesus Christ is King, in fact he is the King of kings, he has all authority in heaven and on Earth. We know that Jesus loves us, that's why he came to die as a human. We saw that he works for our good. Therefore, however tough things may seem, however little sense things may make, we can be sure that in the longer term things will work out well. We may only understand looking back, possibly even looking back from heaven, but Jesus *is* in charge and he *is* working for the good of those he came to save, that's you and me.