**New Kilpatrick**

**21st November 2021**

**John 18:33-37**

**Introduction**

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish…

Being the presbyterians we are… we don’t play a huge importance to the festivals of the church that other denominations emphasis… Easter we always did… but not lent… Christmas is actually fairly new… It was just a working day for my grandfather… Pentecost, yes but not all saints… and reign of christ… we’ve hardly heard of…

Reign of Christ is the last Sunday of the church year… which is today… I only want to whisper this but Advent begins next Sunday… can you believe it!

It began almost 100 years ago… instituted by the Pope in 1925… in response to growing secularism and nationalism… **Jesus** was ruler… not the gathering nationalism… populism… secularism…

I’m not sure how much difference it has made… given… a century later… we are still in the same situation…

In New Kilpatrick… we have observed it over the last ten years… who noticed… but somehow sit uncomfortably with it… because of the juxtaposition of what it implies about Jesus… and what we actually experience and believe about Jesus… which is where we are today… trying to work out how we speak of Jesus… in a world that sees power quite differently from the way faith originally did…

**Prayer**

Holy God

Broken Jesus

Away from the crowns and gold

The thrones and talk of king

Broken Jesus

Away from the angel trains

And soldiers of christ

Broken Jesus

By the pavements and alleyways

The deserts and abandoned villages

May we shift our perception, O God

Of your reign

And let go the world’s language

And expectations

And presumptions

And make space for the lesser

More vulnerable

More costly

Reign of love

May we find kingdom words

Within the poorest and least

Those the world denies and forgets

Leaves hungry and without vaccinations

Open our eyes, O God,

To the vulnerable kingdom

That cannot compete with the world’s wealth

And forgive us

For clothing you in unrighteous garments

And golden thrones

That make you feel uncomfortable

And a religion that has its own vaults

Filled with power and wealth and authority

May we give you a home

In a faith that seeks not outward power

Or strength

Or authority

But in the relationships we build

The community in which we participate

The parish we share

Reigning with a love

As generous as it is unconditional

Hear us as we say the global prayer together

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed by thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

And the glory, forever

Amen

**Scripture**

*Today we find ourselves towards the end of Jesus story: he’s been arrested and has been brought to Pilate. It’s like two characters mixed up in someone else’s issues of religion, faith and power. Reading this story now feels a bit out of sync but it illustrates an important point when we have this significant day called “Reign of Christ”*

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” **34**Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” **35**Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” **36**Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” **37**Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

**Story**

It was the night of the Passover, and Jesus had been arrested. Judas’ kiss has sealed his fate, and he had been taken away into a night that would have him tried six times before the cockerel crowed in the morning.

Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate swept into his headquarters, angry. It had been a long night. He summoned Jesus, looked him up and down, the blood, on his face and arms; the hair, matted; the clothes, torn; the smell, sharp. None of this affected Pilate. He saw this daily. It was the silence; the way Jesus met his eyes.

“Are you King of the Jews?” he asked impatiently. It was what Pilate had been told people were calling this man standing before him.

“Is this your own question, or are you repeating what others have said?” Jesus responded.

Pilate paused and looked Jesus up and down once more. Shrugged his shoulders. “I am not a Jew, am I?”

This conversation was yet again another that he was fed up with, the petty religious sensibilities of a culture he neither understood nor was interested in.

“Your own priests handed you to me. Why? What have you done?”

“I don’t have a kingdom here,” Jesus replied. “If I was a ruler here would not my followers rise up and fight and keep me from being handed over. This isn’t close to being my kingdom.”

“So you are a king?” Pilate asked.

“Your words. Not mine. I am here only to speak to the truth, and those who belong to the truth, recognise my voice.”

Pilate shook his head. “Truth? Pah!” It seemed such a hollow word and a waste of time. He left Jesus and went to speak to the priests again. Hopefully this would be over soon.

**Reflection**

Reign of Christ… It used to be called Christ the King… All very imperial… and that’s the problem…

It’s the juxtaposition that’s important today. The awkwardness between the title of the day, ‘Reign of Christ’ and how that is meant to mean the exact opposite of the words we use.

We talk in imperial language while the real Jesus just knocks that on the head. Every time.

We are so used to imperial language for God in our hymns: rejoice the lord is king, onward christian soldiers, crown him with many crowns, we always ultimately err on the side of that kind of language: kingship, thrones, subduing nations.

And it just feels wrong, so unlike Jesus, yet the church has turned him into a king that he has always denied. And it is all the more important now because there are too many pretenders to the world’s thrones, who seek strength over folk, break rules, and even eat away at democracy itself.

Jesus speaks wholly other to this: of loving the least, being a servant to all, with a self giving love.

And we believe love must win. Does it? That’s an imperial outcome: someone has to win. But that means some other has to lose. It’s as if God’s People are clinging on for some victory because we can’t live in the world any other way. There are only winners and losers.

What if the reign of Christ is simply the ability to give without the idea of ‘winning’ at all? What if the reign of Christ is simply only about giving of yourself, without the caveat of reward or that ‘love will win’?

Perhaps love wins every time it gives itself completely and abundantly to those who understand it least, and abuse it most, without any comeuppance. It gives of itself, and, in the eyes of the world, loses.

There is no final reckoning, any final reward for love. It just gives. No caveat, no red lines, no exceptions. It just gives to the end.

That doesn’t fit well in the world. But neither does it fit well in the church. We want love to win. But then, that’s not “love” we are talking about. And Jesus seems to agree.

That is the world that defines Christ as King, not how Jesus himself talks or lives.

The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead says that a humble Christ was short-lived in the early church, and “the deeper idolatry of fashioning God in the image of Egyptian, Persian and Roman rulers was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.”

It is something to be constantly careful of as we refashion the church and how we speak faith’s hope into the world after pandemics and seek the leaders who will guide us through. There is no hidden Caesar in Christ.

Christ’s reign is of love, given, with nothing returned, no reward for being true to the faith. It is truly self-less, and abundantly generous. There is no winner. It’s a lesson we keep missing in the world.

**Poem: Calling All Kings (Michael Coffey)**

Let those men who know and trust

     their inner king

who trust their own power

     and don’t misuse it,

          who live beyond themselves

          who see the greater vision

          who seek blessing for all

          who create order out of chaos

          who foster peace in themselves and others –

let them embody their king today,

     humbly yet boldly,

     fearlessly and with joyful strength,

for this world is short on mature men

     who know they have generative power

     to give life away

and so many turn to false kings

     boys who think a crown costume is all they need

     who stomp and plunder and turn the land to ruin

     who sound the war siren

          without counting the cost

     and forget that caring for the weakest among us

     and uniting the land as one

          are the reason there are kings at all.

**News**

**Prayer**

Creator

Emperor of the poor and the forgotten

King among the homeless and stateless

We gather round the needs of the world

And pray

Not for a magic touch

But for a relationship

With justice

With creation

With peace

With compassion

And in that relationship

We pray for Afghanistan and Yemen

For Tigray, Sudan and Belsrus

Too many places still

In conflict and pain

For the lives of the poorest

Because of the policies of the wealthiest

and the competition between states

And nations and leaders

For the future of too many

Caught up in uncertainty

In a pandemic yet to stabilise

Vaccines yet to be shared

An environment yet to be loved back

Communities yet to be grown

For those in our parish and communities

Where there is pain and loss

Where there is anxiety and mental ill-health

Where there is fear among women

On these very streets we know

And for our families

And our friends

And the ill

And the worried

For them all we pray

Prayer: the relationships we have with love

The promise to live alongside the least

The way we build and shape and grow the kingdom

Your kingdom

No king or emperor

But companion and servant of all

Hear us

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**