

Proclaiming Jesus as Lord

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 24:44-49

Today goes by a number of names, most traditionally the Sunday before Advent. More imaginatively "Stir Up Sunday" from the collect of the day which starts "Stir up". More recently it has been marked as "Christ the King" Sunday. This really is quite a modern tradition going back to 1921 when it was celebrated in October and since then has moved to this the last Sunday of the liturgical year.

Now there is some logic here, it reminds us as we enter Advent who it is that we are celebrating, the birth of a King. It also makes a great Sunday on which to preach the last in my series of sermons about my proposed mission statement for the Cathedral. We have considered building a community of living faith, profound hope and practical love.¹ Now we come to the centre piece, the lynchpin, the heart of the matter "Proclaiming Jesus as Lord in the heart of Hobart."

It is from such a proclamation of Jesus as Lord, as King that we will build a community of living faith, profound hope and practical love here in the heart of Hobart. But the more we consider this idea, the stranger it will seem that we have one Sunday in the year given over to Christ the King for, as we shall see, it should be central to all that we do through the year, it is to be at the heart of all that we do.

But why is this so important, why should we proclaim Jesus as Lord? Firstly simply because he is, it is a matter of truth, and secondly because of the wonderful benefits which flow from accepting him as Lord. Let us consider these in turn.

WHY PROCLAIM JESUS AS LORD? BECAUSE HE IS

Firstly we proclaim Jesus as Lord because he is. On what basis can we make this audacious claim given the many other claims that people make. It is interesting to note how Paul speaks about Jesus' Lordship and the reason that he gives for it. For instance in Romans 1:3-4 Paul is speaking about the Gospel of God he is proclaiming "regarding his [God's] Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus is seen to be God's Son with all the authority which that brings, he is God's full representative, and how can Paul say this? Because of his resurrection from the dead.

In Ephesians 1, Paul is praying for his fellow believers that they might be strengthened with God's power and says "That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." (19-21). It is hard to imagine a more fulsome description of power. He reigns over all things, everywhere, for all time. This is authority, lordship, sovereignty on a grand scale. And again the basis for this claim is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

¹ Copies of the sermons are available at the back of the Cathedral, or on the website.

In Philippians, Paul says that our attitude should be like that of Jesus who in humble obedience died on the cross and then says "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (9-11) Every knee, your knees, your knees will bow. And it is because of the resurrection, Jesus' exaltation, that we know that this is true.

I could choose plenty more passages but did you start to see something of the breadth of Jesus' Lordship. He is the Son of God, he above all authorities for all time, he is the one before whom all one day will bow the knee.

And how do we know that this is true? The answer is always the same. It is not a religious conviction, a someone's personal idea. It is because of the historical reality of the resurrection, it is because God has raised Jesus from the dead that we can be assured that he has this authority. The ground of Jesus' claim is that he is no longer in the ground, he has a great body of evidence that he is Lord, so to speak.

In fact in the Bible when the early Christians spoke of Jesus as Lord it was a short hand way of saying "Jesus is the one who was dead and now raised and having beaten death is seated at God's right hand with all authority over all things." That is a bit of a mouthful but that is what it is to proclaim "Jesus is Lord". Jesus can say in Matthew's Gospel that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him, and how can he say this, it is not Jesus megalomaniacal moment, but rather it is the logical consequence of the resurrection.

Two Implications

This means a few things straight away. Firstly because Jesus' Lordship is based on what happened in history this claim is not a matter of personal religious choice but it is an objective reality. Acknowledging Jesus' authority is not something that may work for us and our lifestyle, it is to deal with reality.

We do not make Jesus Lord, God has already done that, we simply recognise the authority that Jesus already has. People can deny that it is true, but that doesn't stop it being the truth. Because of the resurrection, to my mind, it is as sensible to deny that Jesus is Lord as denying Mt Everest is a big mountain, that Tiger Woods is a good golf player, and that Tasmania can be cold. You can deny these things as much as you like but they remain true.

Likewise Jesus is Lord, we should recognise that now and freely bow the knee and confess him as Lord, or one day we simply will have to. He is Lord whether you like it or not. Can I urge you to do that now if you haven't accepted the truth and implications of the resurrection and accept Jesus as Lord, your Lord. For those who have accepted Jesus do you need to be reminded of the extent of Jesus' lordship and return to your knees?

Secondly this is why the Christian church must always have the proclamation of Jesus as Lord at the centre of its mission. It is the truth on which the whole of the Christian faith stands, and sadly too often falls when other things become more important. When the church becomes caught up in ethics, or justice, or fellowship, or ritual, or our own spiritual journey it all too quickly loses its way. These are all important things but at our centre must be worship of the risen Jesus and proclamation of the risen Jesus to the glory of God the Father. For from this will flow our commitment to ethics, justice, and fellowship, from this understanding our ritual comes alive with meaning.

WHY PROCLAIM JESUS AS LORD? BECAUSE OF THE BENEFITS.

So the first reason that we proclaim Jesus as Lord is because he is, God has raised him from the dead and he is Lord, and people need to know. But we also proclaim Jesus as Lord because of the benefits which flow both now and into the future.

Paul says in Romans 10:9 that "if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Once

again there is the clear link between Jesus being raised from the dead by God and him being Lord. But more importantly for us right now there is the consequence for us of grasping hold of this, we are saved.

Now this sounds good. As all the adverts tell us saving is a good thing but what does Paul mean when he says that we will be saved?

Salvation in the Bible is very multifaceted but let me try to give some of the ideas.

Forgiven

The first thing salvation means is that we are forgiven. We have to proclaim Jesus as Lord because people generally live as if he was not Lord. They may follow other lords or may believe that they are free to run their own life their own way. But as we said before, Jesus is Lord whether we like it or not. That means when we do not follow Jesus we are in rebellion against the true Lord, against God's appointed authority. This is rebellion and rebellion is serious and it has to be dealt with. It is what the Bible calls sin.

Now the more we think about it, the more we realise that we don't live the way Jesus calls us to. You know that loving your enemy thing is a bit tricky, even loving our neighbour as ourself is hard, and then there is anger being as bad as murder, lust as bad as adultery and so on. This puts us in a bad position before the true Lord.

But when we turn back to Jesus, when we turn from being our own Lord then not only does our rebellion stop, we are saved from the consequences of our former rebellion, the charge sheet is ripped up, put through the shredder, done away with, we have a clean slate with God, because Jesus has dealt with that rebellion on the cross. That is why Jesus says to his disciples "that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47) Our sins are removed from us as far as the East is from the West

As we turn to Jesus as Lord we can then stand not full of fear but assured of forgiveness. This is truly a wonderful thing. This is part of the salvation offered.

True Knowledge of God

The next thing we are saved from is a wrong view of God. So many of us have wrong views of God. Some see him as spiteful, or distant, or uncaring. But when we see that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus has God's authority then we can see that God is far different from what we may have thought. God is like Jesus, and Jesus wants us to know God as he did, as Father, a true and wonderful Father who loves his children.

How do you think about God? Do you need to be saved from a wrong view of him. Remember in Jesus we can know "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1John 3:1) In turning to Jesus we know that God who is with us and will not leave us and welcomes us into his family. This too is salvation.

Life to the full

The next thing we are saved from is a wrong view of life, perhaps even of ourselves. As our view of God is reshaped by Jesus, we see that life is not about what most people think it is. People can think of life being about power, about possessions, about their own happiness, or perhaps most sadly how good they look. But Jesus shows us in his Lordship that this is not the way of true life at all.

In Philippians 2:5-11 we see that Jesus' Lordship is not about power but service, not about control but humility, not self but others. This is the kind of attitude that we are to have and this is what the Bible calls life to the full, a life that recognises the importance of relationships, life in relationship with God and in relationship with others. This is the true way to live, this is the way of glory, this is the way of our Lord, he came to serve us and we are to follow that pattern of life. That is why proclaiming Jesus as Lord will create community, a community which lives out its faith in acts of service and practical love.

The gospel properly proclaimed cannot but create renewed relationships and community. It will create a community committed to acting justly loving mercy and walking humbly with our God. If we really want to have an impact on the problems of our city, if we want to be beacon of light in the heart of Hobart, welcoming to all who enter this place, it will be through being a people transformed by the saving power of the gospel of Jesus, convinced that service is really living and want others to share in this life.

Is this how you understand really living? Do you need to be saved from your view of life? In which case you probably need to be saved from a wrong view of yourself. If we judge ourselves by the standards of our world we will always come up short, we never have enough, do enough, look good enough, and the longer life goes on the less we are ever likely to. But in Jesus we discover that God loves us as we are, he sent Jesus for us, and calls us his children so we are then freed from wrong views of ourselves and wrong motivations for living, perhaps your own view of yourself. Then come to Jesus as Lord and find life to the full.

True Hope.

As we proclaim Jesus as Lord we are inviting people into forgiveness, we are inviting people into a renewed relationship with their creator, we inviting them into a new, fuller, more real way of living. These are all wonderful things. But there is, as the adverts always say, more, we look to a future where we and the whole of creation will be restored, it will be raised renewed just as Jesus was. The salvation which we are offered in Jesus is not just for this life, to improve our life now but is for eternity.

As we saw a couple of weeks ago this is a profound hope and a transforming hope. It is a future where there will be no more mourning, or crying or pain and God himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes. That is a staggeringly intimate image.

I am sure than many of us have had to deal with children who have had the screaming ad dabs, as the tears stream down their face, in hurt, in confusion, in pain, in frustration. So we get down to their level and wipe away the tears. This is the image we have here, the God of all creation bending near to us, his children and dealing with all our pain, hurt, disappointment, as he restores creation.

All of this flows from accepting Jesus as Lord: salvation, forgiveness, true knowledge of God, revelation and motivation for really living and loving and the profound hope of a world put right. We thus should not only proclaim Jesus as Lord because he is, but because of the wonderful life giving and life changing message that it is.

This is why I hope that the motto of the Cathedral will be proclaiming Jesus as Lord in the heart of Hobart. But more importantly I hope that it is a message that each of us has heard and accepted, and what better day than Christ the King Sunday to do just that. And what better day to commit ourselves to make each day at the Cathedral one where we celebrate Christ is King.