

Last Sunday of the Church Year

Sermon Text: John 18:33-37

Theme: “*Our kingdom – is not of this world*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

“A man’s home is his castle!” These famous words were uttered by the character Darryl Kerrigan in the movie, “The Castle”. Of course they date back to a much earlier time and they have meaning in the movie because they are so well known. The idea is that the place that you build, is as much as you make but whether it is grand or small, it belongs to you and no one can take it away from you.

In our gospel reading today, Pilate brings Jesus into his headquarters and questions him about the claims that he is King of the Jews. Would Jesus be another trouble maker claiming authority over the Jewish people who sought freedom from the Romans? Jesus reveals the truth that his kingdom, *nor our kingdom*, is of this world.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

We work hard to build our castles

Most people I know work hard to build their own castle. Whilst the saying “a man’s home is his castle” might focus on the masculine, I think we would agree that both men and women work equally hard in building their own castles, whether this be as a couple or as individuals. We create a space that belongs to us, that we can be proud of and importantly, a place we can feel safe in. Today, perhaps more than ever, this feeling of security is something we work hard to create. It seems that our world is increasingly dangerous and so we seek to protect ourselves and those we love from the dangers of intruders, from financial difficulties, or from anything we don’t like the look of. We build walls around us to protect us.

What sort of a person lives in a castle? I grew up listening to wonderful stories of King Arthur and his knights who lived and ruled from castles. Or what about the stories of Queen Elizabeth or Queen Victoria who ruled with authority and power. They also lived and ruled from their castles. We build our own castle and we seek to rule over our lives, trying to control with power and authority those things which impact on our lives and those we care for.

The problem with a kingdom though is that it doesn’t take long for others to try and gain power over what you are trying to create. It doesn’t take long before you spend your energy protecting what you have. This was the problem facing Pilate when he was questioning Jesus. It seems as though Pilate was an ambitious man who had designs on more important and prestigious positions than the governorship of Jerusalem. Pilate would have been well aware of the Jewish prophecy that a descendant of King David would one day reclaim the throne. Now another person, Jesus, was presented and Pilate questions him to determine whether he was a serious threat or just another person inciting the Jews to rebellion. Pilate was seeking to protect his castle by trying to deny Jesus his rightful kingdom.

Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world

Jesus was not being drawn into Pilates’ games of who has greater authority. In fact he challenges Pilate as to why he is even asking the question. Does Pilate really care about the answer or is he just asking the question because that is what other people are pushing him into? Pilate reveals the awful truth that it is Jesus’ own people who have handed him over to Pilate for judgement. It is the Jews, God’s people who would prefer to remain subjected to Roman rule rather than God’s grace that comes through Jesus Christ.

Remember that the Jews wanted someone strong, someone who would gather the troops and overthrow the Roman rule. They wanted a new King David who would create for them a new kingdom. And because this is what they expected, Jesus turned out to be a great disappointment. The one they welcomed into Jerusalem as their king on Palm Sunday, was being hung out to dry less than a week later. Jesus hadn’t ridden into Jerusalem to seize the city at the head of a mighty army. He had ridden into Jerusalem on a small donkey to die on a cross so not only the Jews but all people might be saved into his everlasting kingdom.

You see, Jesus kingdom was never going to be created in this world. Of course in Jesus’ name we can look around us and we can see the injustices, we can see the tragedies, we can see the work that needs to be done to care for others. It is this sort of work we are called to as faithful Christians. But no matter how hard

we try, nor how good a job we do, there will always be hardship and suffering in this world. This is because Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Jesus went to the cross in order that his heavenly kingdom may be opened up, not only for the Jews, but for all people.

Jesus might have rallied the troops and he may have been able to overthrow the Roman rulers, including Pilate, who were based in Jerusalem. But this was never the plan. Jesus himself said, "If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Such a short sighted solution might have won independence for the Jews for some time, but it would not have established Jesus divine kingdom.

Our kingdom is not of this world

Jesus tells Pilate, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice". To which Pilate famously asks, "What is truth?" Friends, this is once more the question for our times, perhaps more than any other time since Jesus death. "What is truth?" The truth is not ambiguous, it is not flexible, it is not one thing for someone, then something else for another person. *The truth* is grounded in the person of Jesus Christ who was born as a child on the first Christmas Day in order that the way may be opened up for us to join him in his heavenly kingdom. That is the truth.

We work hard to establish our castle here on earth. We build the walls which protect us and those we love. Build them strong because we live in dangerous and uncertain times. But don't build them so strong that we can't what is happening in the world. And don't build them so strong that we lock out Jesus Christ who wants to draw us into his kingdom. No matter what energy and effort we put into building our castles, it is only Jesus' kingdom that remains. There are too many reminders that show us the truth of this.

Many of you will remember friends and family who have died over the years. I can think of one man I know who died seemingly without anything significant to his name. As far as I know, all of his worldly possessions could be fit into a caravan that was about 4-5m long. He died a couple of years ago and he seemed to grow happier and more content as his illness grew more advanced. Whatever he had or didn't have in this world, he was confident in the place that God had prepared for him. This man knew the truth that Jesus' heavenly kingdom had much better appeal for not only himself but for his family and friends. Some of you might know this man, others will know other people who have faced death with similar confidence. The confidence of knowing whether they are rich or poor in this world, the only thing that truly matters is the place that Jesus comes to take us to – his heavenly kingdom.

What is this kingdom, Jesus' kingdom, our kingdom like? Daniel describes an everlasting dominion, one that shall not pass away, one that shall never be destroyed. No matter how strong or powerful the kingdoms we build here on earth, they all run their course and perish. Jesus' kingdom will endure forever. The psalm for this week, Psalm 93, glorifies an everlasting throne of the Lord that points back to the beginning of time as well to the end of time. And in Revelation, John brings a greeting of grace and peace from the one who is and who was and who is to come.

John's revelation describes how Jesus will come again in glory with the clouds, "and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him." Everyone will be judged by the ruler of the heavenly kingdom, including the governor of Jerusalem 2000 years ago. Jesus was brought before Pilate by the Jews who wanted an earthly king. Pilate wanted to know whether his authority in Jerusalem was under attack. Jesus wanted to bring God's grace and peace into a hurting world.

A man's home is his castle, but open the gate to your neighbour and share the good news this Christmas that our heavenly King wants to give all people on earth the gift of everlasting peace in his, in our kingdom that is not of this world but that rests on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.