

Sermon for Sunday 21 November 2021: Christ the King Sunday/Stir Up Sunday

Toss around, move about, mix together

On Christmas Day we had to be very patient and wait until the grandparents arrived. No presents were distributed or opened until that time. By then it was usually 11 or 11.30am! As a child I have very fond memories that, in my family anyway, it was the role of the Grandmother, or Nana, as we called her, to make the Christmas cake, the Christmas fruit pudding along with the trifle. The fruit pudding had coins, 5 cent coins, if I remember correctly, wrapped in tin foil and placed in it prior to the cutting and serving. I remember the real joy for those, especially the children, who received the coin, or several coins, in their piece of pudding. Who had got the coin and just how many had they got. Both the cake and the puddings had alcohol in them, not to speak of just what had gone in to the trifle and how much!! Again, that was Nana's job. And so today is Stir Up Sunday when, as part of the 10am service, we mix the ingredients prepared for the cake. **We all get to take a turn**, to toss the ingredients around, move them about and mix them together. Today and this sharing in the mixing, takes pastoral care and team work to a whole new level!

Today is also Christ the King Sunday. How do the ingredients for the cake and the mixing of those ingredients relate to the type of King Christ was and is, and is to come; and our relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit? Jesus' kingdom is about relationships rather than the power and control that we usually think of in Kings in the world. Jesus said: "my kingdom is not of this world."

Jesus tells Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world!" Some have interpreted this to mean that Jesus' kingdom is in the heavenly realm and so is not relevant to this world. Jesus is saying that the values of his kingdom are different to those in the world we live in. In other words, Jesus does not have to exercise the type of authority that seeks to be on top, which results in oppression, corruption of the judicial system, and precisely the kind of hypocrisy that Pilate exhibited in the interaction between him and Jesus. Jesus tells him: "If my kingdom were from this world, my followers

would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

The values of Jesus’ kingdom are so vastly different from those of this world that often we fail to understand them or even put them in the ‘too hard’ pile. The church, which purports to—and should—represent Jesus’ kingdom, is here to serve in humility rather than to seek earthly power. Jesus is the king, yet he does not arrive in a chariot, but on a donkey! Jesus is a king who is killed by those with societal power, not a king who is victorious over his enemies by defeating them in war.

What do we see in the ingredients that will make up this cake in the elements that make up our faith and our relationships in the world?

I regularly explain my role as a deacon, often to those where I have no idea if they have a faith in God or faith in anything in particular. I explain that the priest gathers the people in and the deacon sends the people out, to live out their faith in the community and the world. I explain the holistic approach to care like the layers of an onion—the outer layer represents physical health/care, the middle layers represent psychological or mental health and the inner most layer is our faith or the spiritual dimension of health. It is within this central or innermost layer is where what is core to us, what is most important to us, our core beliefs and values lie. Of course it is not as simple as that as the layers overlap and are interdependent on each other to make up whole beings. Just as the ingredients that go into the cake, by themselves they may be underwhelming, but mixed together in the cake they pack a real punch as our senses are excited.

So how do the ingredients for the cake, the tossing around, the mixing together and moving about represent our faith journey and our developing relationship with God? As we face celebrations and challenges in our lives we are indeed tossed around, mixed together and moved about. I often think and indeed, say to others, it is not so much about what happens to us but what we learn and how we respond. What kind

of King is Christ in our lives and how does that play out in our faith and in the relationships we have with others?

Eggs, sugar and butter already mixed together. These are the basic beginnings of our Christmas cake. These represent the foundation of our faith; our beliefs, values, priorities that make up our developing relationship with God. The critical elements of our faith, our prayer life, reading of the bible, reflection, the time we take to listen to and speak with God. We are all servants whether we are members of the congregation, lay ministers, Deacons or Priests. Our roles within that may be different though. Our servant hood and roles in the church and out into the community are served by the foundations of our faith, those critical elements by which we live out that faith. Christ as King didn't emphasise power and dominion over others, He was the servant King as the ultimate model for us. Christ reminds the whole Church that serving others is essential to the ministry of us all.

The people of God are sent on mission to the people in the neighbourhood, or on the other side of the world. That mission embraces evangelism, nurture, service to those in need, the transformation of unjust social structures and the care of God's creation. We are all equipped for mission with the gifts of the Spirit for ministry.

Add zest. Grated orange rind. This represents our zest for life and faith; the enthusiasm that lies within that tough outer layer. Where does the enthusiasm for our faith lie? Do we keep it all tucked up warm and snug inside, proud that it is hidden away from others? Or do we enthusiastically share our faith – in words and actions? This is where the courage comes from that allows us to share our faith. May be we even step outside of our 'comfort zone', or take a risk as we share our faith and with that, what is most important to us at our central core.

Christ made us to be a kingdom to serve His God and Father. We are reminded by the Holy Spirit that all who believe and are baptised receive a ministry to proclaim Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and to love and serve the people with whom they live and work. In Christ they are to bring redemption, to reconcile and make whole. They are to be salt for the earth; they are to be light to the world.

The Spices; the ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves. These provide flavouring, aroma, fragrance from natural sources; from a trace through to a strong odour or taste; sources of excitement or interest. This is represented in the opportunities or challenges we take on in life and how we respond to those. The ways we extend ourselves, perhaps move out of our comfort zone, meet and mix people very different to ourselves, we step out in faith. Christ as King met with and responded to those who were often demeaned, disempowered and disadvantaged by others. The giving of our time and talents to those who were seen to be on the fringes or the margins of society and paid little attention to by others. Our call has not changed in the world today. The COVID pandemic has added several new layers to that call. There are more vulnerable, isolated and fearful people around us. The developing relationship between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated is a crucial part of this.

The Flavouring: the essences (vanilla, lemon, almond) represent our uniqueness. What makes us and our faith different from that of the next person? How do we sell that uniqueness when we talk about or live out our faith and just what it means to us in our life. This is a vital means of our role as role models, as we live out our life with Christ as our ultimate role model to guide our way. In this way we keep our faith alive in 2021 for others to see and hear about and beyond. It is not so much in what we say but in how we live our lives and how we are seen to do so.

Christ as King reminds the whole church that serving others, such as those we hear about in Matthew chapter 25, along with the modern day equivalents, is essential to all ministry. The King will reply: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me". We all have the responsibility to ensure that those in need are cared for with Christ-like compassion and humility. In practice this means that we have a concern for particular groups of people or context within our society. For example those in rest homes, hospitals, prisons, for families, students, those who live alone, social justice, care of creation.

Flour and mixed fruit added by the scoopful. The flour forms that basis of our faith, it holds everything together. The mixed fruit with all the varieties of fruits represents

the many different stories we bring to our faith as it develops. The triumphs and the tragedies we have experienced in our lives. Those fruits also represent the different life journeys of others and how they too influence our lives and our faith journeys. We influence others and they influence us and God is in the centre, in centre of the mix. We toss all of that around as we thank God, we might bargain with him, we might be angry with God at times, we might say God, why me? We might challenge God. Always praising and thanking God.

The Orange juice brings the mix alive and makes it real. Commitment in the belief that the Bible contains all that is essential for salvation and reveals God's living word in Jesus Christ. God will provide understanding in study of the scriptures. God will also give us the strength and humility. That the scriptures will reveal to us the mind and heart of Christ, and shape his/her ministry. Committing to duty and joy in witness to Christ crucified and risen; to be constant in prayer and study with imagination and perseverance; that God will give us the grace to work in partnership with sisters and brothers in Christ's service. To live the gospel in order to challenge others with the demands of love.

Brandy provides that extra bit of spirit, that extra 'zing', that uniqueness. This is the means by which we inspire others, we encourage and motivate others in the way we lead our lives and share our faith through the smooth and the rough patches, always mindful of God at the centre. We toss around, move about and mix together as we relate to God and to others, as supporter and the supported.

Christ gave gifts abundantly to the Church. Some he made apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for their work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ. **We all have gifts, each and every one of us have gifts with which to serve Christ** in our ministries as we reach out to others in our families, our neighbourhoods, our community, our country and even beyond. We reach out to the lost, the least and the last. We nourish with food and drink, we clothe, we visit the sick and the imprisoned. These gifts are in us to be

stirred by God; mixed, tossed and moved. In the name of Christ, the ultimate mover and shaker in His time and indeed in our world today.

As we move in to the season of Advent and toward the Christmas season, a time when people seem to grow impatient and the pace really picks up, let us remember who Christ the King is in our lives as we live in relationship with Him and others around us.

AMEN

The Rev. Faye Davenport