

## **Christ the King 2015 – Choral Evensong**

### **Daniel 5; John 6: 1- 5**

I wonder whether anybody watched BBC Question Time with David Dimbleby on Thursday evening. Actually, I didn't watch beyond the first few minutes: I soon started faffing about with the dogs and shutting down the house for the night. But I was forcefully struck by the opening comments of David Dimbleby, even before the signature music began to play. What he said was: "Welcome to London, where we shall be discussing the events of the last seven days which have changed the world."

Of course, everybody knew immediately what he was talking about, the Paris attacks. And you'd have to be absolutely heartless not to sympathise with the empathy David Dimebleby was showing when he described them as events that have changed the world.

That's precisely what they are. The course of British foreign policy and the conduct of international real politic for the next 15 to 20 years may well come to be determined by the response to those attacks. And the entire service of a generation of members of the armed forces may come to be shaped by that response. So none of us was going to bat an eyelid at David Dimbleby's comments on Thursday evening.

But now it's Sunday evening. And we're in the Priory celebrating the Feast of Christ the King with Choral Evensong. And that means that we're trotting out again, as we do annually, what it means for Christians to say that Christ is King. This is the final Sunday of the church's year. It is the culmination of the whole God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ project. Next Sunday, Advent Sunday, is New Year's Day, so far as the church is concerned. We go back to the beginning and start again the cycle through which the mystery of salvation is unfolded. Now, though, this Sunday is

the end of that cycle and we celebrate all that it has accomplished.

God has come from heaven and shared his life with ours; he has shown us how to live; he has died for us; he has been raised from the dead for us; he has left us his Holy Spirit; and now is once again reunited with the Godhead in heaven. Through all this he has united his divinity with our humanity and our humanity with his divinity. He has interrupted the space/time continuum and drawn all of history, both past and future, through this series of events which is *the* ultimate, climactic and decisive set of events in history, in the light of which the significance of all other events are determined.

And that means that for Christians celebrating Christ the King, however serious the massacres in Paris were, however shocking we find them, however heart-rending we find them, they are not events which have changed the world. They are, tragically, the world

being the world. Even though they are tragic and even though they matter – nobody is saying they don't – they are symptoms of the world which has already been changed by Christ's victory over them; which occurred 2000 years ago, but the effects of which victory are only felt to the extent that we enact them – personally, socially, commercially and politically.

That's what it means to celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. Only, I suspect, we don't really believe it. Or, at least, to be frankly personal in my confession, as I have had, this week, to contemplate climbing into this pulpit to say something about Christ the King, only a week or so after the Paris atrocities, I have had to face up to the conclusion that my faith is not strong enough really to believe it.

It's about 35 years or so since I made a commitment for Christ to be King of my life. I've made all sorts of life-changing or at least life-determining decisions

predicated on that commitment. But as I've reflected on my response to Paris this week, I'm not convinced it's made a damn bit of difference.

The logical conclusion of saying that Christ is King is that you live as a citizen of his kingdom in a Christ-like way. And the Christ-like way to meet forces of destruction is to do as he did when Judas led the soldiers into the garden of Gethsemane to arrest him: he disarmed Peter and offered no resistance. And therefore the Christ-like response to the threat posed by the so-called Islamic State is to disarm ourselves and offer no resistance. There is nothing to resist: the victory has already been won.

But I'm not going to suggest it. It would be an insult to the memory of all those who died and an affront to common decency. To be sure, I'm not exactly gun-ho. My trigger-happiness is hedged about with all sorts of caveats. I am convinced that there are lessons to be learnt from the invasion of Iraq and I strongly suspect

that they haven't been learnt. It would be an act of folly and hubris of Blairite proportions to launch attacks on Isis held territories without unambiguous legal authorisation and a strategic and long term commitment to the peace that would follow; so knee jerk reactions are out. Nevertheless I'm sure I'm doing no more than giving voice to everyone here and to all right thinking people when I say, with some sense of urgency, that something must be done . . . but I don't trust God to do it. And things have come to a pretty pass when you put more faith in David Cameron than you do in God Almighty.

It was the father of the incurable epileptic who said to Jesus "I believe; help my unbelief." It's probably something many of have said; and it's tempting to leave this sermon like that this evening. But it seems to me that it's a cheap and inadequate response to the divine command of Jesus to each one of us when he says "Follow me." There is an element in it of shrugging our shoulders; as if God cannot reasonably

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expect to ask any more from us and therefore will have to make up the deficiency himself. I'm clear that, instead, we need more acutely to be aware of our dependence on God's grace to assist us faithfully to navigate our way through living, at the same time, in two very different kingdoms.

Amen.