

# A Church of Missionary Disciples

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*A sermon given on the Sunday Before Advent, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021 – the Festival of Christ the King - by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale, in Beverley Minster*

*Acts 2:36-47; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20*

For any who are visiting, we are in the middle of a series of sermons about our Vision Statement - a new way of thinking here in the Minster, taking us forward beyond the pandemic, thinking today about Christ the King and the next part of our Vision Statement.

So, one of the most memorable funerals that I have ever taken here in the Minster concluded with Robert playing 'The Circle of Life' from the Lion King - (I have the pleasure of going to see it in a couple of weeks with my youngest niece.) - and it was picked with a particular family member of mine who had been baptised here in the Minster, had been married here, and now at the end of his life was being commended back to God in the place that they began, celebrating all that they had been and the legacy that they had left in the lives of their family and friends.

And our celebration of Christ the King this morning has some echoes of the same. We are celebrating the moment that Jesus returns to sit at God's right hand as fully triumphant King. We're also recognising the legacy that Christ has left us to become his followers, to tell his story, to remember his death, and to pass on his love and hope. And as a complete circle of life, it is also the end of the Church year. And if you've seen the Circle of Life song, it's when the Lion King is held up triumphant above all else. And in a sense that's what we are doing today, musically and liturgically. We are holding up the completion of the story of Christ: we've heard of his birth, where Kings came to visit him in a stable; we've walked through his life where he continually walked away from the title of King and instead modelled service to the poor and marginalised, rejecting all earthly systems of power and grandeur; and then his death, where he was proclaimed King of the Jews on a wooden notice banged in as part of a public execution; his resurrection and his ascension. Next week will be Advent, and the story will begin all over again, the 'Circle of Life': as we will hear the angel foretelling the birth of Jesus; the prophets calling in the wilderness about the baby born to be Prophet priest and a whole new kind of King.

All churches go through circles of life with new things beginning, new people joining and others moving away or joining God in glory. Last week we paused to lament for all that we have lost during the months of the Pandemic, all that we continue to struggle with, our endings. And during this Jonathan invited us to look to the one who pronounces blessing, not as a matter of empty words, but as the one who stands beside us, comforting and strengthening, who goes before us to cavalry and death, who breaks through to resurrection and eternal life, and who invites us to follow him there, not to give up but to trust him to show us the way.

And this is at the heart of what it means in the third ambition of our vision statement to be growing a Church of Missionary disciples: we are committed to helping people not only celebrate Christ as King, but to know and follow the one who is the light and hope for all the world, whether it is in a stable on a cross or from the glory of Heaven. Being a missionary disciple is both an individual and a collective way of life. Jesus invites us all to follow Him and to share his story and our readings point to what this looks like, being baptised, publicly declaring we're part of God's family, asking for the gift of the Holy Spirit to comfort and to guide, breaking bread together as we will do shortly, praying for the needs of the world, healing the sick - such has been the tradition here down the ages - and carrying the light of faith wherever we go, to whoever we meet.

Beyond this, each of us will follow Him to different people, places and situations according to our passions, gifts and life circumstances. As individuals, we may carry the light of Christ to school or to a hospital; to shine within our homes or in a busy office; we may support the food bank or a cancer charity; we may work for justice; or hold the hand of a lonely person in their care home. Collectively, we shine a much brighter light and grow together.

At 'The Crossing', which is our four o'clock family focus service, we celebrated Halloween with a 'Light Party' out in the secret garden just as the clocks had gone back, and there was a glorious point at which there were dozens of sparklers piercing the darkness along with our glowing pumpkins and fire pits. And each of the lights was a different shape and took a different form and was in a different place. Some were still and comforting, others, if you can imagine a child with a sparkler, were moving wildly.

And for me, this is a glorious illustration of what being a Church of missionary disciples looks like. Our vision strategy, which you can read online or grab a paper copy from the North Transept, puts prayer at the centre: we have daily prayer happening here publicly each morning and over the noontime; we have opportunities for us all to learn to pray deeper and in more creative ways, both silently and together with one another. We have a section on the mission of restoration for the whole of creation, considering our environmental stewardship and our response to the climate disaster, responding to Jesus as King of the created world. We're constantly seeking new ways to care for each other, both within and without these walls and to strengthen our links with our mission partners, both here locally, and around the world.

You'll hear more about all of these areas in the New Year but if you want to know more before then, feel free to ask and to see how you can get involved.

Finally, you may have heard of this Sunday before Advent as Stir-up Sunday. If you haven't, a brief explanation: in our Book of Common Prayer Communion, which took place here at eight o'clock this morning, we have a Collect -

*Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

Now the 'stir-up' part has become linked to stirring Christmas puddings, particularly with the word fruit in there. And it is actually a good time to prepare one a month ahead of Christmas, or, as somebody told me this morning, you're apparently meant to make them now for Christmas 2022 - you heard it here, I did not know that - but the collect is not actually inviting us to get going with our Christmas baking, it's actually inviting us, having heard the whole of Christ's story, to stir up our wills; to get involved; to be actively part of a Church of missionary disciples.

And so as we celebrate Christ the King, Christ the Servant King, let us stir up our wills and commit ourselves afresh to living and telling the good news.

## Reading Text

Acts 2:36-47

<sup>36</sup> Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." <sup>40</sup> And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. <sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

<sup>1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" <sup>6</sup> And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has

come near to you.' <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

<sup>17</sup> The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" <sup>18</sup> He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. <sup>19</sup> See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."