Bridge of Allan – Christ the King 201111

Confirmations

There is much to celebrate in the life of St Saviour’s congregation. Your worship and music continue to develop – your church is obviously a place of prayer. There is the work with children and with students and many more good things.

I went to visit the Occupy encampment in St Andrews Square in Edinburgh last Monday evening. I went partly because of what the protest is about – and partly because of the way in which the encampment in London got entangled with St Paul’s Cathedral. I went with our Communications Officer and with the Rector of St John’s in Princes Street. At the entrance, I met a reporter from the Times who said to me, ‘One of the clergy from St Paul’s said that he met Jesus among the people of the camp. Do you expect to meet Jesus here?’ To which I responded that I expected to find Jesus wherever people suffer or where they struggle for justice. I believe that the gospel has what the late Bishop David Shepherd of Liverpool called a ‘bias to the poor’ Then I said to him that I also expected to find Jesus among people in banking and financial services who are striving to work with integrity – who are trying to save a failing financial system from collapse – and to find a new set of values on which our financial and political life in the next generation can be built.

In the hour that I spent with them, I certainly spent more time talking about what the bible says and what our faith teaches than would be likely in most church meetings. I wanted to find out who they were, why they were there and what they were trying to achieve. They wanted to find out from me how Christian faith responds to the things they care about. And they told me about how they are trying to build a new kind of community based on sharing and service. They were on the edge of naïve – and yet they were obviously struggling for some new kind of community.

Today’s Gospel speaks of the kingdom – a new kind of community in which we respond as if to Jesus himself when faced with the hungry, sick, naked, prisoners … If there is a test, it is a test of what we do for the least not the greatest. And the rule of Christ the King which we celebrate today is a radically different kind of authority – seated at the right hand of God far above all rule, authority, power and dominion – yet imbued with humility and service, care for the weak and the lost

All of that is important when we celebrate and give thanks for the life of a congregation. This church is here as a place of prayer, of comfort and of hope. But we’re also here to challenge, provoke and encourage the search for the heart of the gospel and for a better life. If you watched Rev this week, you will have seen that. The Vicar feels completely hopeless – intimidated and overawed by the talents of his energetic new curate. And yet he was the one out in the churchyard spending time with the down and outs – making disciples, teaching and baptising.

Which brings us to today’s Confirmations. Confirmation is in its own way a sort of pitching of the tent. It says, ‘This is where I am – this is what I feel called to grow into – this is the transformation which I seek in my life’ And it seeks the blessing of the Holy Spirit along that journey. The questions connect back to the stark choices of Baptism – Jesus Christ or the devil – light or dark. And the questions also seek a commitment to Christian living – within the community of faith, its teaching, fellowship, bread-breaking and prayer; in proclamation and service which declare the Gospel; in work for justice and peace.

I said that the protesters were ‘on the edge of naïve’. That’s not a bad place to be. There’s innocence and vulnerability in that. There’s optimism and hopefulness as well. It’s short on the selfishness and self-centredness which have are at the centre of so many of our problems today And it seems to be about aiming for things which we cannot possibly bring about ourselves just by wanting to.

That is the nature of Christian calling for Louise and Victora – for each of us – and for this congregation. It reminds us that Jesus whom we follow is a king not just in authority but in humility and service. It calls us to offer our lives in the same humility.