

REFLECTION by Jacqueline Kemp (Reader)

Christians throughout the world worship in different ways; different languages, in different cultures, different denominations. I chose to be an Anglican at 17, despite a very thorough Roman Catholic education from the age of 8 to 15 in a day attendance convent school. I was accustomed to the Mass in Latin, including Bible readings. (This has changed in the Roman Church since the Vatican 2 council in 1962). The Anglican Church is reformed, having from the outset, services and Bible readings, 'in a language understood by the people'. However it retained that great blessing, the liturgical year, where we live week by week through the story of our faith.

This is the last Sunday of the church year. Next week we start into Advent, the four Sundays preparing us for Christmas. From Christmas to Easter we study the life and teaching of Jesus, including the reflective period of Lent, then post Easter up to Pentecost. There follows a long period of Sundays after Pentecost where we track the the early development of the church and examine more closely the life and teaching of Jesus. Today is the last day when we celebrate Christ as a triumphant King.

For the past two weeks we have been edging towards this last day. Revd. Michael picked up the theme of being prepared for the last judgement. Megan spoke of the fear of condemnation at the judgement, with those terrible pictures of Hell.

Today's readings celebrate both triumph and judgement. The Old Testament reading from the prophet Ezekial identifies God as the Great Shepherd of the Jews, an image with which they would be familiar since their remembered history as nomadic tribesmen travelling with their herds of sheep and goats. This Shepherd cares for his sheep but must also judge them ready for trading or feeding the people. Psalm 95 is a song of praise, celebrating the power and might of God, but it also acknowledges the caring Shepherd of his people. The epistle reading is one of encouragement.

The Gospel reading portrays Christ the King in a magnificent court. In the palaces of the ancient world this was also a court of judgement. Jesus in this passage is talking about final judgement. This scene was also a great subject for commissioned church paintings. Classically they are composed in three layers; God at the top with the righteous, sinners in Hell at the bottom with numerous devils and in the middle the judgement. Here details show the saved being helped upwards by angels but others being dragged to Hell by demons.

But Jesus concentrates on how we are to be judged. To some he was saying, you ignored the needy, those who were hungry, sick, imprisoned. They protest that if it had been Jesus himself, they would have done all they could to relieve his suffering. But we are where we are, Jesus no longer walks the earth, so we are expected extend his love to others.

A final note about images. The East window at Holy Trinity portrays the Transfiguration, the time when Jesus took Peter, James and John to a hilltop and they had a vision of him in glory with Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the prophets) on either side. It has puzzled me that the centre panel is not Christ in a white robe, but Christ, the Good Shepherd. Now having pondered on these readings and the message of the Transfiguration, I understand that the window designer found it entirely appropriate to show Christ as God, the Great Shepherd.