



**Sermon preached by The Very Reverend Christine Wilson
at her installation on 22 October 2016**

I want to take as my text those intriguing words: “my kingdom is not of this world”.

As I step into the role of dean and reflect upon the sort of leadership that Jesus modelled, this short piece of text is a great source of inspiration and a good starting place to consider this new moment in the history of this extraordinary place.

I wonder, in the light of those words from Jesus, how this cathedral foundation might be distinctive from other places of power and influence? How do we do things differently?

For the best part of a thousand years, a Christian community has worshipped up on this hill. In its greatest moments, what has made this place counter cultural is the shaping of lives on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the faithful witness to the signs of an extraordinary kingdom that is like no other.

In our reading, the trial scene is set with the condemned man standing before Pilate. In an attempt to deflect the ultimate responsibility, Pilate tries to get Jesus to incriminate himself. “Are you the King of the Jews?”

It is one of those no win situations. Jesus is all too aware that the question has been set up to trap him. He is a disrupter, his prophetic action and uncomfortable words disturb the status quo. So, hardly surprising then that his enemies are plotting to get rid of him because of the threat he poses.

He sidesteps the question when he replies “my kingdom is not of this world.”

Usually, kingdoms and empires involve lavish lifestyles, immense power, courtiers jostling for favour and the rewards of loyal service. They could be very cruel places where arbitrary judgments and idle chatter could have fatal consequences.

I was struck by the concluding scenes from the recent TV drama Victoria in the way it portrayed her emerging as a just and compassionate ruler in her dealings with a ‘would be’ assassin whom the legal court has judged to be mentally ill.

The young queen whose uncle, the King of Hanover, has been loitering at court in the hope she might die in childbirth so that he can inherit the throne (nice sort of relative to have!) challenges her to show strength and power by having her attacker executed without mercy. Queen Victoria chooses to do things differently, to do justly and love mercy. It is something of a turning point for her which brings confidence. Perhaps a bit smugly, she exits the scene taking a side swipe at her uncle, declaring that she finds great comfort in knowing that she will always be a considerably better monarch than he could ever be.

We have this invitation to be part of a Kingdom that is not of this world. To do things differently.

So what might that look like?

Elsewhere in the gospel accounts, Jesus responds to two ambitious disciples who appear to be jostling to sit at his left and right in heavenly glory. They are told such a costly reward will

involve becoming the least and the last. Likewise, in the parables he told about banquets, in the end it was the people from the highways and byways who sat down to dine. This other worldly kingdom is certainly a challenging and an uncomfortable place. It was ridiculous and absurd to some.

The courtiers who shared Christ's daily life were peasants and fishermen and some who had been labelled sinners. He moved about freely in the midst of very ordinary people. Despite all the numerous religious purity codes, the long list of untouchables and outcasts in society, Jesus constantly flouted the rules and reached out to everyone: including the alarming and the unpredictable.

He took the time to be amongst those that society counted as worthless and on the margins: with the outcast, the poor and the stranger.

We can be sure that many would have been asking themselves "what sort of Kingdom is this?"

They would have been scandalised at the idea of a king who stoops to perform the duties of a servant at a supper table. Washing the feet of his guests.

"My kingdom is not of this world."

There is an icon painting that I was introduced to recently that depicts Mary laying her Son in the tomb. His body is scarred and broken and the title of that icon is Christ the King of Glory. Jesus reveals in that image the extraordinary love of God for everyone. Behold your King who is prepared to suffer and die for you. To give away his power and sacrifice all out of love.

He invites his followers to do likewise, to take up their Cross and follow him and he tells them that, to really experience life in all its fullness, you have to be prepared to give it away. To really experience the joy and embrace the wonder of this Kingdom is to live by its extraordinary rules where the weak become strong, the last become first and greatness is revealed in service to others. To enter is to be constantly challenged and surprised, to act differently and to let go of so much of what the world treasures and counts of value.

This is the pearl of great price, life giving and liberating but costly.

My Kingdom is not of this world. It is quite a text to have as the appointed reading for evening prayer on such an occasion as this.

On the day my appointment was announced, I asked the question; "When you look up at the cathedral in the night sky do you see the building or the light?"

The cathedral has been described as iconic and icons are regarded as representative symbols worthy of veneration.

It is not difficult to kindle hopes and dreams when you step into the challenge and excitement of being the new dean of Lincoln. That is the easy bit! I return constantly to the image of light and the idea of the building as an iconic symbol on the landscape. A place of influence and distinctiveness.

It becomes a building worthy of veneration through radiating the message of Christ the king of glory. Through being floodlit with the light of Christ as we seek to share something of the radical, upside down message of a kingdom that is not of this world.

Whether you are part of the cathedral community, a Lincolnite, from the county, the diocese, a friend or colleague, I hope that we can find many ways to work together under God to enable this place to be notorious because of all that is encountered, proclaimed, spills out and touches the lives of people from the top of this hill – especially those who are on the margins.

May Lincoln Cathedral be a sign, an icon of Christ the King of glory, revealing a glimpse of heaven, connecting with people's lives and pointing to a Kingdom that is not of this world.

Amen.