

Christ the King
22/11/2015

Mark the Evangelist

Revelation 1:4-8b

Psalm 93

John 18:33-37

Zombie Jesus

If you haven't noticed that zombies are everywhere these days, then you've not been paying enough attention. I don't mean the zombies who might be your children first thing in the morning, or perhaps your spouse around the same hour, not your colleagues on a Monday morning nor those who are simply going through the motions at the shopping centre or sitting in traffic. I mean real, rampaging, flesh-eating zombies. The Wikipedia List of Zombie Films entry notes 435 zombie films since 1932, of which 262 have been made in the last 15 years, 87 in the last five years, and to which can be added another half dozen or so popular TV series. In fact, had you not chosen to come to church this morning, you could be watching "The Scouts' Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse" right this minute in a cinema not so far, far away from here! My nephew was wearing a T-shirt last week describing the necessary elements of a zombie apocalypse survival plan, and there is a book on my son's bookshelf relating the exploits of a Very Hungry Zombie, which are not unlike those of a famous caterpillar. Zombies *are* everywhere.

Yet, for the uninitiated, a quick Zombies-101: Zombies are dead people, walking. They generally walk with some difficulty because, being dead, they tend to be falling apart. The principle reason zombies walk is to find non-zombies, in order to eat them. If you survive being bitten (or partially eaten) by a zombie, you become a zombie yourself. This process can lead to an exponential growth in the number of zombies which, unchecked, can result in a zombie apocalypse. This is not an apocalypse in the sense we considered last week – the revelation of the peculiar righteousness of God – but the more common, culturally received sense of apocalypse: a zombie Armageddon. Being already dead, zombies cannot be killed although they can be returned to being ordinary corpses. This is typically achieved by a shotgun blast, or baseball bat swing, to the head. Averting a zombie apocalypse, therefore, is usually a very messy business.

Even if you are new to whole the zombie thing, you'll perhaps not be surprised that there has developed in recent times the notion of Zombie Jesus. This is basically a mockery of the church's confession of the Resurrection, with Zombie Jesus Day becoming the designation of Easter. God may well be amused, but we can never quite know...

Whatever the case there, this morning I want to use the idea of Zombie Jesus to help us to make some sense of what we are doing when we declare that Jesus is king.

The concept of Zombie Jesus brings two realities into relationship with each other: the historically received confession of the Resurrection, and the contemporary sense for the zombie. In this case, the *controlling* element is zombie theory; if someone is said no longer to be properly dead, he must be a zombie. In Zombie Jesus, zombieness *absorbs* the resurrection, and so gives it content beyond a simple declaration that Jesus is no longer dead. The zombie sets the basic condition for understanding who the "resurrected" Jesus now is.

So the argument goes. It actually doesn't matter whether there are such things as zombies or not. What is important is the logic: one thing being defined in terms of the other, and you need to know about both the resurrection and zombies in order for Zombie Jesus to make any sense.

This is all pretty silly but the point is that speaking of Jesus as *king* would seem rather silly, if we hadn't just happened to have been doing it for nearly 2000 years. The language is so natural to us – believers and non-believers alike – that we haven't noticed that it doesn't tell us very much these days, or that when it did once say something substantial, it didn't make much sense.

We can get *some* sense out of King Jesus today because there are still kings and queens around. Yet, *their* primary purpose today is as public relations officers and content for supermarket checkout magazine covers. This, of course, is not what we mean when we say that Jesus is king. But then what do we mean?

It is very difficult to say, despite the language of our prayers and hymns (even in today's worship service), being full of the kingship of Jesus. This is because "king" is a pretty empty concept for us these days. We don't really know kings. At least "Zombie Jesus" might suggest that there is something dangerous about the risen Jesus; a risen "king" Jesus neither threatens us nor gives us much heart.

But, even under the best of circumstances – when a king was *really* a king – what does it communicate to speak of King Jesus? When two realities are brought together in the way "Jesus" and "king" might be, one of them tends to "win". The same applies to Zombie Jesus. As it usually appears about the place, the person of Jesus is swallowed up by the label Zombie Jesus. But theologically it works the other way around: Jesus swallows up zombieness.

What could this possibly mean? Just one illustration: whereas it is the nature of the beast that a zombie seeks victims to consume, Jesus says, "Eat *me*. Eat *my* flesh, drink *my* blood." This is a turning on its head of what it means to be a zombie. In the most unzombielike way, Zombie Jesus does not consume others, but gives himself to be consumed.

What difference does this make? It averts a zombie apocalypse. There is here no exponential multiplication of victims. Only one is consumed, and those who consume him do so not to spread death but that they might have a share in the bringing of life. We are not consumed, and we are not to consume others.

I suggested at the beginning that if you hadn't noticed that zombies were everywhere, you've not been paying attention. If you *have* been paying attention since then, you might have noticed that I haven't gotten to my scriptural text yet, and we're running out of time!

Our text from Revelation today has been chosen for the lectionary because it is very clearly a "kingship" text concerning Jesus, the king of the kings of the earth who "made us to be a kingdom". In fact there are also other ascriptions to Jesus in this text: "the faithful witness", "the firstborn of the dead", the one "coming on the clouds". But, apart from our familiarity with these expressions by virtue of their being in the Bible, these are all much like the "king" ascription to Jesus – just a bit too socially and politically unreal to us to mean very much.

But what they were doing for those who first heard them was taking things which mattered and re-working them through the person of Jesus. If you seek the one who tells the truth, it is Jesus. If you want to know what the end looks like, and who brings it, look to Jesus. But, most importantly, this is a *surprise* because Jesus doesn't look like these things. "So *you* are a king?" Pilate asks in astonishment. This is the crucial thing in anything we might dare to say about Jesus – it will not make sense to begin with.

And if we knew zombies well enough it would make no sense to speak of Zombie Jesus. This is not because it is offensive, nor because it gets the Resurrection wrong, nor even because Zombies are make-believe. Rather, it would make no sense because we cannot see how could it be possible to live and at the same time not be consuming others, not taking them for granted, not prioritising our own needs over theirs, not paying them enough, not allowing them to be themselves (different from us). How could it be that human life not be competitive, each of us pursuing selfish needs, trusting in an "invisible hand" to use our consumption to benefit those who are disadvantaged in the contest? So much of our lives are about trying not to be consumed, even if we are unaware that it is actually happening; and eating is a good way of not being eaten.

In the face of this, Jesus stands before Pilate. He is about to be consumed, for this will be expedient for Pilate. But as he stands there he makes present a kingdom "not from here", a different kind of economy, a different way of evaluating and relating to each other. This making-present is a promise and a calling.

The promise is not merely that the kingdom *will* come, but that it *can* – here and now. The Word can become flesh, heaven-as-earth.

The calling is not that we *look* for this heaven-as-earth, "coming on the clouds", but that we *become* it. We do not become this kingdom of our own efforts, but are "made to be a kingdom" by a king who does not merely command but serves and enables – an unkingly king.

What is promised here, and what we are called to become, is not alien to us for it is what we are created to be. And so Christ gives us what we will be so that we can become what he gives: his own Body, a richness of humanity unknown but desired, the secret of all our best efforts at ruling and consuming, and all of our worst.

"I am the bread of life," declares Jesus, the king who gives us himself: "Those who eat of me shall not hunger, and those who drink of me shall never thirst" (cf. John 6.35,37).

Here is a promise and a call to all consumed by their own and others' hunger for life.

By the grace of God, may his people respond with joy in the promise and commitment to the call. Amen.
