

Christ the King – Last Sunday after Trinity

22 nd November Christ the King Last Sunday after Trinity Stir Up Sunday!	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Ezekiel 34 vv 11-24 p865 Ephesians 1 vv 15-23 p1123 Matthew 25 vv 31-46 p995
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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.*

So I will seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day. Ezekiel 34¹².

The dark and cloudy day. It was a dark, foggy and dirty day when I first went to Mirfield in Yorkshire. It was about this time of year and the year was 1978. I was a Theology student at King's College London in training for the ordained ministry. When I first went to King's in 1976, the understanding was that, when we had completed our three year academic course in London, we ordinands would spend a further year at St Augustine's College, Canterbury learning the other skills we should need as clergy. While I was at King's, however, St Augustine's College suddenly closed and the Church was left with the problem of finding an appropriate finishing school for King's graduates. At short notice, the theological colleges were asked to provide a one year course for graduates, which was difficult for them with their own teachers and students already committed to two and three year courses, and we King's students were invited to apply to be fitted in wherever possible. I was rejected by Westcott House, Cambridge, though I had the distinction of being interviewed by a future Archbishop of Canterbury – Rowan Williams – and I applied to the College of the Resurrection at Mirfield. I was not impressed with the town when I first got off the train – cold, dark and disagreeable, to use a phrase from Arnold Ridley's *The Ghost Train*, in which I had a part in the college play. I was Teddy if I remember rightly. Anyway, I wasn't much happier about the College of the Resurrection than I was with the town. It is closely connected with the monastic Community of the Resurrection. The students seemed to be expected to wear cassocks all the time. The chapel and services were far too Catholic for me. The college too felt to me to be dark and disagreeable, even though there were some fine men on the staff and I was fairly friendly with another King's student who would eventually go there. It was coming up to my birthday when I went up there and, when I could grab a free afternoon, I decided to visit some Pentecostal friends from Rainham who had now settled near Todmorden close to the Yorkshire / Lancashire border. Everybody else seemed to be away elsewhere in the building doing something and, on my own, I couldn't find the correct exit. I escaped by climbing over a gate, which somehow seemed symbolic. There followed a bus ride and a long walk up onto the moors and I needed a lift back in order to make it in time for whatever the next session was. I didn't like the college and I didn't like the town and I expect it was a mutual decision that I did not go there. Where I did study for my final year was at Ripon College Cuddesdon which is in a very pretty village about eight miles from Oxford. The countryside environment suited me much better than that of a grimy industrial town in decline, although I can't say I really enjoyed the year I spent there. If Mirfield was too Catholic for me, Cuddesdon was too liberal. In any case, by that time, I just wanted to be set free of full time education, to receive the grace of ordination and to get on with the work to which I believed God was calling me, as I still do.

I was unfair to Mirfield, however. The Community and the College are a light shining in the darkness. The style of worship might not be to my taste, but it is authentic. The scholarship is faithful, the prayer life is Spirit-filled, and the members of the community and the deacons and priests they prepare for ministry are faithful servants of God. The community moved from Oxford to Mirfield in 1898 deliberately to be better placed to work among the poor. The college was established in 1902 to train for the ministry men without the means to pay for their own education. The emphasis has always been on teaching, missionary work and pastoral care. They have fostered good relations with other churches and deeper understanding in the ecumenical movement. Brothers from Mirfield have established work in other countries especially in South Africa where they played an important role in bringing and end to Apartheid. Bishop Trevor Huddleston was a member of the Mirfield community who had a long ministry in South Africa. Archbishop Desmond Tutu says of him, "The biggest defining moment in my life was when I saw Trevor Huddleston and I was maybe nine or so. I didn't know it was Trevor Huddleston, but I saw this tall, white priest in a black cassock doff his hat to my mother who was a domestic worker. I didn't know then that it would have affected me so much, but it was something that was really - it blew your mind that a white man would doff his hat. And subsequently I discovered, of course, that this was quite consistent with his theology that every person is of significance, of infinite value, because they are created in the image of God. And the passion with which he opposed apartheid and any other injustice is something that I sought then to emulate." Desmond Tutu, of course, was active not only in bringing about change in South Africa but in the Truth & Reconciliation process which followed the end of apartheid and did so much to prevent the news state descending into civil war.

It was at a service at Mirfield that I first heard this Sunday referred to as *Christ the King*, which was then just the Catholic name for the last Sunday of the liturgical year. In those days we had boring names for it like *Last Sunday after Trinity*, *First Sunday before Advent*, *Fifth Sunday before Christmas*, or, light-heartedly *Stir up Sunday*, because the collect begins *Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people* and it is supposed to remind people to stir up their Christmas puddings, though some cooks say that that should have been done long ago!

But Christ is the King. The King is the Shepherd. The Shepherd takes care of us and what He requires of us is that we take care of one another.