

Christ the King 2019

Today is the final Sunday of the liturgical year, the celebration of Christ the King. Next week is Advent and we begin the cycle of worship over again.

What though does it mean to us? Christ the King.

What I know about King's and Kingdoms comes from stories and history.

Aragorn is the warrior king who claims back his throne in the epic finale in the Lord of the Rings Trilogy.

There are plenty of Disney films of Kings and Queens, Princes and Princesses. Some Kings are bumbling benevolent old duffers, some are proud and distant lordly characters.

Our own history can be told through the lives of the monarchy, whether it's Henry VIII and his wives or the Queens father King George VI, the reluctant King.

When I turn to the bible we have Kings like Nebuchadnezzar who had a vast empire and a 90 foot statue made of Gold. Everyone must bow down.

Or King Herod who murdered members of his own family and slaughtered the innocent in his rage at the birth of Jesus.

This is the knowledge we have of Kings, both fictional and historical.

What kind of King is Jesus?

He is a King like no other and His kingdom is a kingdom like no other.

He is the Servant King.

His life and ministry was to serve others. He healed the sick and made the lame walk. He fed the hungry. He broke through the religious barriers and told people over and over again, the kingdom of heaven is near. God's love and forgiveness are for everyone. He invited in the sort of people that society would look away from. He ate meals with sinners and the tax collectors, prostitutes. Adulterers, thieves and rebellious people found a friend.

He challenged the unjust treatment of women. He preached the need for patience with children. He overturned the norms of society and delighted a people burdened with religious flim-flam.

He touched lepers and made them clean. He opened the eyes of the blind. He told stories that made an ethnic outcast a hero and he accused the Pharisees and Sadducees of lacking good faith.

What a topsy turvey kingdom!

And the church, as the body of Christ...needs to have uppermost in mind that service is a hallmark of the kingdom. As it says in the Graham Kendrick hymn we sing

From heaven you came helpless babe  
Entered our world your glory veiled  
Not to be served, but to serve  
And give your life that we might live.

He is the servant King.

He is also the Suffering King.

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Our Gospel reading takes us to the scene of crucifixion. The awful drama enacted so many times by Roman soldiers, this time it was at the request of the Jewish religious authorities. Neither Jews or Romans knew that they were playing a part in the drama of salvation. For their part in it, Jesus asks for forgiveness.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus entered into the suffering of others. Our epistle tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. In Jesus we see God, so his actions and words reveal God to us.

He enters into the suffering of others and reveals that God suffers. He confronted death, he confronted sickness, he confronted injustice and brought hope to the captives.

In the story of the prodigal son, the father gives his son his part of the inheritance and allows him to go, to travel, to spend to live recklessly. The Father grants free-will. But this Father waits, and watches for his son to return. The inheritance was generous, but the forgiveness and welcome back was even more abundant. This father had mourned for his lost son, he suffered...and thus celebrates wildly when the son chooses to return.

The scene on the cross is the most revealing. Jesus is mocked and ridiculed. He is taunted. He saved others, let him save himself. But Jesus chose not to save himself in order that we might be saved. One of the thieves is hurling insults and curses he wants Jesus to save himself and "us". But somehow – and it is never explained – the other thief recognises Jesus innocence and kingship. Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

On the cross, suffering in agony, Jesus promises one of the thieves suffering with him that he too will see paradise. Jesus is the servant King and the suffering King.

He is supreme.

Hear the passage again – this time you are not hearing St.Paul but Eugene Peterson's version from the Message

<sup>15-18</sup> We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—*everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

<sup>18-20</sup> He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

WOW.

This is Jesus Christ...our servant king, our suffering King, our King Supreme over ALL things. He is the light of the world.

Last Tuesday I went with Dolapo and Terry and Carol to the ordination and consecration of Oliva as our new Bishop at St.Paul's Cathedral. In that magnificent setting and with the cathedral full,

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we shared in a 2 hour service with tremendous pomp and ceremony.

Obviously it wasn't as fabulous as Terry's ordination is going to be here on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, but they tried really hard.

I do sometimes feel slightly uncomfortable at events like that. All the Bishops in their red robes, the chapter in their glorious copes, the processions, the vergers, the ceremony of it all.

Then when I read a passage like the one from Colossians I remember that Jesus is the Supreme King over all things and there are times when His church should reflect that grandeur.

And what do we read in the service? This is part of the liturgy of ordination for Bishops.

They are to have a special care for the poor, the outcast and those who are in need. They are to seek out the lost and lead them home with rejoicing, declaring the absolution and forgiveness of sins to those who turn to Christ.

Bishops, Priests and Deacons are by their life and ministry to reflect Christ the King, to serve, to share and endure suffering, to acknowledge Christ's supremacy over all things.

The church does like to make a fuss of its Bishop's Priests and Deacons and we shall not hold back from making a fuss of Terry as he is ordained – even though he doesn't want us too.

But if Bishops Priests and Deacons are following Christ as they should, it is to serve the needs of others and promote them in their calling to serve.

It brings me again to Carol's painting – only when ALL the church are fulfilling their calling can we truly reflect Christ the King.

