

**ADDRESS****20 November 2016****Christ the King**


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Jeremiah 23.1-6	The coming king
Song of Zechariah	
Colossians 1.11-20	The supremacy of Christ
Luke 23. 33-43	The Kingdom of Christ

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*Open our minds, O Lord, to hear and understand your Word, and open our hearts to do your will. We ask in Jesus' name. AMEN.*

During our recent holiday in Europe, we did the summer tour of Buckingham Palace with my son and his family. My grandchildren were not impressed. 'I'd hate to live here', one of them said, 'All that awful marble'. And the youngest one wanted to know, 'Who does all the dusting?' I told her that, actually, the Queen did it herself, in between giving out knighthoods and receiving ambassadors and things, but I don't think she believed me.

The heart of the palace is the throne room. At the end of the room, beneath an ornate canopy, are three steps, and on the top step are two thrones of red silk, one embroidered in gold, EiiR, and the other embroidered with a gold P. We were told that during the later years of the reign of King George VI, the Princess Elizabeth would stand on the second step during royal investitures and receptions. When she became queen, she took one step up.

Later I asked one of the royal household, *'When the Queen conducts an investiture, do the new knights and dames step up, or does the Queen step down to tap them on the shoulder?'* I was told the Queen stepped down to the level of those she was about to honour. This, I thought, is a reminder of the greater king, King Jesus, who, *though he was in the form of God, was born in human likeness; he humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death.*

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King, on the last Sunday of the church's year, as we look forward to a new year, to a new beginning, to a new Advent, to another Christmas, to new opportunities to enrich our spiritual life and come closer to the God who has come close to us.

The Feast of Christ the King is a comparatively new celebration. Pope Pius the 11<sup>th</sup> proclaimed it in 1925, during the Vatican's long-running dispute with the Italian state. There was politics as well as religion behind the proclamation. But most other churches came to see that the new celebration highlighted important truths and included the Feast of Christ the King in their liturgical calendar in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the Revised Common Lectionary.

So what do the lectionary readings for today tell us? Firstly, that Christ is the king promised long ago to the Jewish people, to redeem them from their enemies and to execute justice and

righteousness in every land. He is the true shepherd, the one who leads his people into all goodness and all truth. Unlike the rulers whom Jeremiah is condemning.

Zechariah's prophetic hymn sees his new-born son as the forerunner of Jesus, the greatest of all kings – not just one who would save us from our enemies, but the one who would bring light and peace to the world. The king whom we can serve without fear, in life and in death.

Paul tells the Colossians that he is confident that his prayers for them will be answered with a “yes”, because believers have become citizens of Christ's kingdom. Jesus is supreme over all earthly kings, he is the image of the invisible God, he is the one who brings peace to all through his sacrifice on the cross.

And the familiar Gospel account reminds us that Christ's kingdom is, above all, a heavenly kingdom. As he came to earth to be with us, all those who acknowledge him as king will live with him in his kingdom, rejoicing in his power and his glory and his love.

These are all central truths of the Gospel – Jesus is the king of the universe, whose reign will outlast the rule of all kings and presidents and dictators -- we could be topical and say Jesus Trumps them all, because he is God, immortal, while they, they are mortal and will one day pass into history, while Christ is ever-living, ever-present

The Bible has a lot to say about kings, because, in early times, every city had its warrior king. His duty was to protect his own city against other kings, and conquer other kings, and enslave their people to expand his territory and increase his power.

In the past, kings were autocrats, whose power was absolute. There are still seven absolute monarchs on earth today, eight if you include the Kim dynasty in North Korea, but the world's other 40 monarchies are nations where kings or queens reign but do not rule and exercise only as much power as the people are willing to allow them.

Our king Jesus is both an absolute monarch **and** a people's king-- he does not force anyone to acknowledge him as king, but when they do, he asks for their complete submission to his power and his love. As he is perfectly obedient to the Father, he calls on us to be perfect in our obedience to him.

At the end of our service today, we will again be invited to submit – the words are familiar. . . *Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice, through Jesus Christ our Lord . . .* What happened to the animals that were sacrificed in the temple? They died. When we become a living sacrifice, our old nature dies, as St Paul puts it, *we become a new creation, the old things have passed away, all things have become new.*

Now, all of us acknowledge Jesus as king, to some degree. We would not be here otherwise. But how many of us acknowledge Jesus as king over every part of our lives, as absolute ruler of our time and our money?

During our holiday, we also took a taxi tour of Athens. When we came to parking area for the hill of the Acropolis – I looked to the right, and up, and gulped. There were people swarming up to reach some of the world's greatest ancient buildings, and but they were right on the top of the hill, 400 feet above me, and I wondered if I could make it. It had rained the night before and the marble hill was still wet, and slippery. Some of the steps had no handrails.

But Marty said, *Just take one step at a time*. Each time I came to a rough patch, she said, *Just one more step*. So I took one step, and then another, and then another. When the going got tough, there was always someone to give me a hand -- *just one more step*, and then another, until at last we reached the top, and we walked between the great marble temples of the Parthenon and the Erechtheon and we looked down on the Areopagus where Paul preached to the Athenians 1 965 years ago and marvelled. I had achieved what I had thought was impossible, but I had not done it on my own

Isn't this another analogy of the Christian life? We may find it impossible to surrender our will to the will of God completely, all at once, but we can all take one more step. And then another. And St Mark's offers us plenty of helping hands, especially in Advent, at the start of a new church year.

We have prayers, Taize style each month. Next month there will be three sessions, to mark Advent. Our Wednesday morning communion service is not just for the Carinya people, or for those who cannot come to church on Sundays -- it is another opportunity for us all to worship God, and to reflect on the glory and mystery of the sacrifice of Christ the King.

We have Bible study in the rectory every Wednesday. And we can come here for an hour of meditation on a Thursday afternoon, to still our bodies and our minds in the presence of God. We can support the nursing home ministry and/ or Rachel's children's programs by simply coming and talking to people, to show that St Mark's is a caring and loving community. And some of you have taught me about making time for acts of random kindness, like visiting the sick and comforting the dying or phoning someone we haven't seen for a while, or writing Christmas cards for people shut in in our nursing homes.

To enrich our spiritual lives, we can take more time to read the Scriptures and to pray in a systematic way with the help of the Bible Reading Fellowship. Or our hymnbook. Or our prayer book. We can read a book to strengthen our faith – borrow one from the parish library, or visit a Christian bookshop. We can all give King Jesus a little more of our time.

We can also review how we spend our money. We may all be able to spend a little less on ourselves and give a little more to the parish, and to ABM or some other missionary society, and to the Christmas Bowl and to other Christian agencies that help to alleviate human suffering in the name of Jesus the king.

Most of us won't be able to do all these things. But we can all take one more step, one step up towards perfect obedience to our king. For our own spiritual health, and for the health of the parish.

In my young days as a Methodist, we often sang a hymn about coming closer to God. It begins *O the bitter shame and sorrow . . .* that we should be unmoved by the shame and the glory of King Jesus on the Cross. In verse 1 we are *All of self and none of thee*; in verse 2 we step up to *Some of self and some of thee* (that's where, I guess, most of us are); in verse 3 we take at least one more step to *Less of self and more of thee*; and verse 4 is a prayer, an aspiration, not a boast, *None of self, and all of thee*.

One day, King Jesus will welcome us to Paradise as he welcomed the dying thief. The closer we come to him in life, the less we need to fear death. #