

ADDRESS**20 November 2022****Christ the King**

Jeremiah 23.1-6	Evil shepherds
Song of Zechariah	Servant of the Saviour
Col.1.11-20	The kingdom of God's Son
Luke 23.33-43	The king of the Jews

May your Word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory.

A few weeks ago, Marty and I attended the second-last performance of this year's passion play in the village of Oberammagau in Bavaria. The play is staged five days a week for six months every ten years to honour a vow made in 1633 when the village was saved from the plague.

Almost everyone in the village has a part in the play, so at times there were two or three hundred or so people on stage at one time, often shouting at each other, or shouting at Jesus, the king of the Jews, who was being mocked and beaten and tried for his life in front of them. No wonder Pilate feared a riot was about to begin and gave in to the pressure from the high priest and the mob.

Yet, amid all the tumult, you had the sense that Jesus was actually in control, that he really was the people's king, standing still and silent while the tumult swirled all around him. He knew that the Father was with him, and that no earthly suffering really mattered. because God would have the last word.

In the ancient world, every city had its own king, and its own god. These kings spent much of their time fighting each other in the name of their gods, wanting to expand their kingdoms, or just to hang on to them. The Jewish Scriptures record many battles involving the kings of Israel -- battles between them, and struggles against their enemies, the kings of surrounding tribes, or against the great powers of the time, Assyria, Babylon and Egypt.

Some of these kings honoured God and cared for their people, others didn't -- the historical books of the Jewish Scriptures say they did evil in the sight of the Lord, Jeremiah calls them evil shepherds, who scattered the flock entrusted to their care.

Today most countries have replaced their kings, and queens, whose rule is based on ancestry and tradition, with elected presidents, whose authority comes from the people. Most modern-day royals are constitutional monarchs, who are above politics, who reign without ruling; but several are old-style absolute rulers, ruling, they say, by divine right.

Most come to the throne through their position in the family; several are elected from among the royal princes; some are simply nominal rulers, like the tribal kings of Africa and Indonesia and the three Herods of the New Testament. But all are mortal, as we were reminded recently.

Queen Elizabeth died the day we flew to Europe, but we did not know for several days in the closed world of the cruise ship. When we visited Winchester cathedral five days later, the nave had been stripped and there were several tribute stations on both sides, with candles burning in front of the queen's portrait.

Australia now shares a king with 13 other realms, an absent king, for he clearly cannot be in 14 places at once. Most scholars of politics and government now call Australia a crowned republic, because the king has no actual authority: the governor-general who represents him has become almost invisible, and all power and glory goes to the politicians whom we elect.

Yes, those men and women whom we criticise when they disappoint us, when they break their promises, when they are exposed as corrupt, they are the ones **we** voted for., to whom we handed power.

In a similar way, King Jesus is virtually invisible in daily life, in the media, and in the day-to-day decisions of most people, at least in the Western world. We have just read again some of Jesus' last words on the cross. He told one of the criminals-crucified with him, *Today you will be with me in Paradise*. He says the same to each of us on the day we die. Paradise is his divine kingdom.

There are stories in a number of cultures about the chaos which results when the king is absent or unseen. In one of the plays of Rabindranath Tagore, based on a story in the Upanishads, the One of the Hindu Scriptures, the chaos lasts until the king returns and the people acclaim him., crying *We are all kings in this kingdom of our king*.

Tagore intended his play to be a political statement, written at a time when their far-distant emperor was about to visit India for the first time, but it could almost be a Christian cry of triumph.. *We are all kings in this kingdom of our king*. We become truly human when we elect Jesus as our lord and king in this life, knowing that his lordship will be fully revealed in the next.

The classic unseen-king story in our culture is England during the long absences of Richard the First, who reigned for ten years, but spent less than six months in England during that time and never learned to speak English. While he was away on crusade, his younger brother schemed to take over his throne, the greedy barons became more and more powerful, and the common people suffered higher and higher taxation, to swell the coffers of the regent and the barons, and to fund Richard's crusade. Magna Carta is often hailed as a victory for the people, but it was mainly a victory for the barons.

We can look at our own culture, and see what happens when Jesus is no longer widely acknowledged as king – when those who do honour him are mocked, and even forced to abandon their careers to please those who deride religion, any religion. As well, there is growing fear of another world war, beginning closer to home, in Asia rather than in Europe, and rising anxiety about climate change, and increased levels of mental illness, especially among young people.

The king we honour today is immortal, triumphant, ruling in Paradise as one of the holy and undivided Trinity. Those who mocked him and condemned him on the streets of Jerusalem may have thought they were doing the right thing, the wise thing, but, as Paul writes so chillingly, *Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

So our king may be unseen, but he is ever-present – we reach out to him each week in our liturgy, our worship, and can come to him at any time, in prayer, in times of pain, in times of hope, and in the times of disappointment that come to all of us. This world is not really a kingdom of darkness, as some Christians call it, it is the world God created, and we can live in His light even in this earthly life.

So what does King Jesus ask of us, in this time of grace? While on earth he gave us the answer, in one of the parables recorded in the Gospel according to St Matthew – the parable of the talents – he expects us to use the talents he has given each of us to extend his kingdom.

In Jesus' time, a talent was just a weight, of gold or silver, used to settle debts. One talent was anything between 25 kilos and 28 kilos, depending on which king issued it. But its value was almost always 6 000 denarii, 6 000 times a labourer's daily wage.

So Jesus was speaking in terms of money, big money, as a symbol of the enormous gifts all of us have been given to use for his glory. Jesus may be largely unseen in his world, but he can be king in all our hearts, as we give him our loyalty, as we are obedient to his command to serve others, and as we proclaim his saving grace.

May we all be willing subjects of Jesus, our Saviour and our king.