

Christ the King 2019

Fr Jarred Mercer

2 Samuel 5.1-3; Colossians 1.12-20; Luke 23.35-43

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Kings and rulers throughout history don't typically spark a warm glow in us. Stories of tyrants, wars, and greed have long cast their shadow over the legacies of kings and kingdoms, even in a modern nation with a well-loved monarch.

Think of Christian VII of Denmark, an overgrown man-child who leap-frogged over dignitaries when they bowed to him, and who built his own torture rack and had *himself* tied to it and flogged. King Frederick the Great of Prussia threatened to cut off the noses of anyone who refused to eat potatoes. And in 1921, the 15-year-old former emperor of China, Puyi, asked for a phone to be installed in his palace for personal use. His advisors feared the independence it would give him and tried to keep it out of his hands. But when he finally got it, he just used it to make random prank calls. The true forerunner of the Twitter presidency!

'If you are a king ... save yourself!'

This mockery from jeering soldiers at Jesus' crucifixion: 'save yourself!', 'show us your kingship through self-preservation', seems perfectly sensible to us, really. Much more than prank calls and potatoes, protectionism, self-promotion, prestige, are things virtually indistinguishable from our understanding of 'power' and authority, from our understanding of rule, or the state, or 'kingship'. Just take a moment and think of our modern political discourse:

economic stability, national security, and more, the endless line of 'us vs. them' agendas intent on retaining power and influence even at the expense of overpowering and silencing others.

Brute strength, oppression, manipulation, narcissism, exploitation. These things often come to mind when we think of kingly reign, or rule, or power.

From childish leapfroggers to dangerous demagogues, the idea of a king who rules over all 'thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities' in the universe seems to me, quite frankly, terrifying.

But the point is that Christ is not the King we expected; not the assumed sort of power that we are used to. The mocking temptation for self-preservation is met only with silent resistance. And it is by Christ's resistance to being the expected king, a king as we know kings, to possess and exercise power as we know power, that we see what his kingship is like. Earthly powers may be self-serving, narcissistic, focussed on self-preservation and prestige; earthly powers may demonstrate their forcefulness through *overpowering* others. But here the King of the universe shows us true kingship, true power, by dying a cruel death on a Roman cross as a convicted criminal. Christ demonstrates his power by becoming the *victim* of over-lording, oppressive powers. And this is where we see what true power looks like.

We do not believe in a God who remains far off and distant, but a God who comes to us, who is so near as to inhabit our very humanity. The Christian claim is that Jesus Christ is God-with-us, Emmanuel. And so the letter to Colossians makes the extraordinary claim: 'In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell'. In Jesus, the perfect life and love and power of God is lived out in human territory, is *translated* into human existence, so that we learn who God is, what God's love and grace and power are like by gazing upon Jesus.

But we look to Jesus and we see vulnerability, we see God's power displayed in *powerlessness*. Why?

'In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross' (Col. 1.19-20).

Christ reaches down even to the point of death and shows us that there is no aspect of our lives, no part of us, no dusty, untouched, forgotten crevice in the universe that is not reconciled to God in love. God in Christ enters into the depths of our humanity, even to the point of agony and death, so that nothing and no one is left untouched by God's love, and no part of us is left unredeemed. The cross that announces the message of Christ's kingdom—that there is no place that God's love will not go. And so the wounds of Christ's cross embrace the wounds the whole world.

The declaration of this kingdom is not in the cries of an over-lording monarch demanding your service. It is in the vulnerable tears of one who is broken. And the call of the kingdom is not for political allegiance or military prowess or sycophantic flattery; the call of the kingdom is: 'you are loved'. And there is nothing you have ever done to earn that love and nothing you could ever do to lose it. The call of this kingdom is to know that the truest, deepest, most real thing about you is not your weakness or your strength, not your accomplishments or failures, not what you 'do' with your life or what career you have, but that you are loved.

And that you are not loved, and you are not *you*, because you always do the right thing, or you have earned that promotion, or because of who you yourself do or do not love, or 'because' of anything. There is no *because* in God's love.

God is not a utilitarian, working out the best scenario, the best *use* of love; who best to offer it to for the best possible return on the investment.

God is a reckless, squanderer of love! And you are *not* an investment, you are not worthy or unworthy. You are simply, forever, no matter what, the object, the aim, of perfect love. *You. You* are loved. Broken, depressed, lonely, fearful, sorrowful or joyful, empty or fulfilled. *You*. And there is nothing more liberating than this. This, the salvation, this the reconciling work of our King.

And there is more good news: because Christ has lived out God's perfect love within our humanity, that love is now a human possibility, it is now at home in our world. So that we, in Christ and by the gift of the Spirit, can inhabit that love not by running from the world or escaping it, but by truly living within it. Christ as King does not only mean that Christ has embraced the world in love, it means that as members of Christ's kingdom *we* are free to love—wherever it leads us, whatever the cost. Through the cross of Christ, God's boundless, indiscriminate love is now ours to give. In Christ perfect divine love is a human reality, and we find ourselves mixed up in God's love bursting into the world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that 'the space of the church is not there in order to fight with the world for a piece of its territory, but precisely to testify to the world that it is still the world, namely the world that is loved and reconciled by God' (*Ethics*, 63). And this is the life of Christ's kingdom, this is the glorious freedom lived with Christ the King. Because 'in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things ... making peace through the blood of the cross'.

Jesus Christ, divine love in human life, stands before us—broken, wounded, defeated, and poured out in love. And there we behold as well

each one of us, with all our wounded parts, embraced, remade in that love: there at the cross, where the world is reconciled; there at the cross, where our King is crowned.