

Sermon for Christ the King
Grafton Cathedral
24 November 2024 Year B
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Cast your minds back to the Coronation service of King Charles last year.

Did you watch it?

I certainly did! What a festive occasion, with all the bells and whistles that the Anglican Church can provide!

Those of us who are interested in that kind of thing had a particular moment that stood out for us. I wonder what that moment was for you?

For me, it was right at the start, after all the grand processions, straight after the anthem “I was glad when they said unto me” – Psalm 122 – which has been used for the entrance of the Monarch since about 1626.

A young boy – a Chorister – Samuel Strachan aged 14, stepped forward, and addressed the King:

Your Majesty, as children of the Kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings.

One of the youngest people present, and alongside all the royalty, heads of state and celebrities present, he was probably least “important”, and yet here he was greeting and welcoming the new King, in order to start the proceedings.

The King responded: *In his name, and after his example, I come not to be served, but to serve.*

Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. We are reminded that the Kingdom of God is not so much a place as a way of being – a reign of justice, mercy and love that Jesus came to bring (Mark 1:15).

King of Kings is a name given to Jesus in the Bible (Rev 19:16) and Christians believe that he reigns forever as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Unlike many earthly kings or rulers, Jesus Christ came not to wield power by force, or the threat of force, but to show the power of love.



Today's readings spell out for us what this servant leadership of Christ our King looks like, as well as what it is not.

In John, Jesus, having been arrested, is brought before Pilate. As the military leader of the Roman occupying forces, Pilate represents the pinnacle of military might and dictatorship.

He is *trying* to understand this person Jesus and what kind of leader he might be.

In response to Pilate's questions, Jesus says: *"My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."* (v36) ³⁷ Pilate asked him, *"So you are a king?"*

You get the impression that Pilate is so fixed in the mindset of military might, power by force and coercion, that he has absolutely no idea, no concept, of the kind of leadership that Jesus was talking about.

Jesus responds: *For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*" (v37).

Truth. Servant leadership. Humility. Things that a leader like Pilate, and sadly some leaders today, seem not to value or even understand.

And then in Daniel (7:9-14) we glimpse the majesty and glory of our King of Kings.

*As I watched,
thrones were set in place,
and an Ancient One^a took his throne,
his clothing was white as snow ...*

*... I saw one like a human being^a
coming with the clouds of heaven.*

*And he came to the Ancient One^b
and was presented before him.*

¹⁴ *To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.*

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
that shall never be destroyed.*

What a beautiful vision of God on his throne, crowning Christ our King. We delight in that vision today.

For Daniel, this beautiful vision drowned out some other stuff that was going on: including the terrible noise of the beast with multiple horns, representing powers opposing God (cf (Zech. 1:18-21[2:1-4]; Dan. 7:8; Rev. 13:1). *I watched then because of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking* (v11). One horn in particular was spewing out self-engrossed arrogance. Few claim to be able to understand these apocalyptic visions, but a take away for us in the context of Christ the King, is that the reality of human evil is always present, threatening to drown out, or oppose, God's beauty.

We often gloss over the reality of evil. The Lectionary for today suggested we omit verses 11-13 which refer to the arrogant horn, that spewed out a terrible noise opposing God. We might find that offensive. But maybe we need to be reminded that while we celebrate and honour the humble, servant kingship of

Christ, we live in a world that increasingly blesses and rewards the arrogant, the greedy and the powerful. Sadly the rise of fascism and right wing extremism is producing arrogant leaders with scant regard for integrity, truth, or the people they serve.

Yet still, we're called to consider the haunting words of this humble man of sorrows, who stood before the mighty Pontius Pilate, like a sheep before slaughter *For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*

Humility and truth. Sadly these are reflected less and less in the lives of the most powerful today.

He looked down from the cross and forgave the arrogant and powerful ones who put him there. His words and ways endure far beyond all those of other kings and leaders that the world celebrates and gives more and more power to.

As the Dean explained, today is the beginning of Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence (www.tencommitments.org.au).

You might ask - what has this got to do with Christ the King?

Leaders have a lot to do with setting the tone of a culture, setting the standard of behaviour, of what is acceptable and what is not.

Through permitting a culture where coercive control is okay, where the misuse of power or domination are acceptable, even by turning a blind eye to it and not confronting it, leaders can permit a culture where violence of all kinds flourishes.

To reduce Gender based violence, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, let's create a safe and respectful culture modelled on the humble, servant leadership of Christ.

So today we give thanks for Christ our King

We pray for leaders, such as Charles our King, who models servant leadership – as did his mother our late Queen. In the face of narcissistic, arrogant and egotistical leaders that tear our world apart, we so much need wise, servant leaders who are committed to the common good of the whole flock, not just to their own advancement.

We need to pray for leaders and encourage honest people of integrity to enter politics and take on leadership roles. Addressing the issues that the people face, rather than advancing their own interests or the vested interests of a few.

Like King Charles at the start of the coronation service, we each here today are welcomed in the name of the King of Kings. May we respond that in the name of the King of Kings, and after his example, that we come not to be served, but to serve.

Prayer: For Leaders – grant them the virtues of a true leader (Christ the King)
From The Canterbury Book of New Parish Prayers

Lord, [as we celebrate our eternal King,] we pray for all those who exercise leadership in this world:

*Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ calls us not servants but friends,
and came not to be served but to serve,
grant his spirit of humility to all those who lead the nations of this earth.
Take from them all pride and love of personal gain,
and grant them
judgement in confusion,
courage in adversity
and compassion in all things,
that through their actions
our world may be a place of greater fairness, respect and
enjoyment for all peoples,
through the transforming power of the King of Glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*