

Readings for the Feast of Christ the King

23rd November 2025

First Reading: Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Second Reading: Colossians 1:11-20

Brothers and sisters: May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Gospel: St Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

A Reflection for the Feast of Christ the King

From Rev'd Anne Macdonald

When we think of Jesus Christ is the word king one of the first to come to mind?

Today's Gospel reading from Luke certainly refers to him in that way. It is an insult: "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" which implies that he cannot, and the Roman soldiers and the watching crowd definitely understood it in that way. Initially they thought that Jesus was being mocked, but for some watching, mockery turned to belief as the world shook and changed forever.

In John's account Pilate wrote the inscription "This is the King of the Jews", which would have raised all sorts of ideas about Jesus's kingship. The word "King" was attached to Jesus and being a king was not necessarily seen as a positive role in the eyes of the people of that time. This was partly because they were ruled by a combination of Roman governors and the puppet kings of the Herod Dynasty. However, to get a fuller sense of why this was the case we also need to look back into the Old Testament.

We know from the early books like Genesis and Exodus that the tribes of Israel did not initially have kings. When they wandered in the desert after fleeing Egypt, Moses and Joshua were their leaders, and were eventually supported by a council, but they were not kings. As we read the Old Testament, we see that as the people became more settled there was an era of Judges, but then the people asked for a king so that they could be more like the people around them. The Lord told Samuel to listen to their voice and to anoint Saul as their king. Some of the kings were good devout rulers, others were very far from it.

It is a sorry tale: a bit of a blockbuster, full of excitement, war, exploitation, surely worthy of being made into a Netflix drama and taking on Game of Thrones. One of the key figures in this story is David. A great man, but also ruthless and flawed, so very much human. His son Solomon was cast in a similar mode, but ultimately fell from grace. Most of those who followed were renowned for their wickedness. When I try to focus on just how bad some of the kings and queens were I always think of Ahab and Jezebel worshipping Baal, and Elijah fleeing to the mountains to escape their wrath. There were some good kings, and indeed kings who served God's purpose. God had promised that David's line would continue for ever, and this is brought to our attention in today's reading from Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was one of the most important voices calling the kings and the people back to God and "good living", to use a nice Scottish phrase. He lived approximately four hundred years after David, but that does not mean that Jeremiah did not have a clear idea about "David's line". In this reading we see Jeremiah relaying the word of the Lord. "Woe to the Shepherds", meaning those who held the responsibility for leading the people and who did not protect or guide them. Then we read a renewal of God's promise to David "...I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land".

Here God is recognising David and the ill that has been carried out by some of his descendants, and promising again that something good will come from David's line. Now we know from the Christmas story that Joseph was a descendant of the royal line from David and in Christian theology we recognise that this is a reference to Jesus.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, also recognised God's promise to David in his words at the birth of his son: "He has raised up for us a mighty saviour born of the house of his servant David".

Paul, like the writers of the Gospels, would also have been aware of the history relating to the promise of a king from David's line. In the passage from Colossians, we hear him pull in the image of Christ as king in his reference to "the kingdom of his (God's) beloved son".

It is easy to think of the word king in secular terms. Like the people of the time of Jesus we have a mixed view of what a king is. We speak of the King of Rock and Roll; the Gypsy King (Tyson Fury, the boxer, for those who do not follow the sports pages); king of this; king of that; kingmakers, or even despots. Perhaps we remember stories like Robin Hood and King John or dynasties like the one in North Korea. We might think of the service and faith of the late Queen Elizabeth or of the image of King Charles praying with Pope Leo. In many of these examples the word king denotes secular responsibilities or image or power, and frequently power without responsibility for others.

Whatever comes to mind, the question remains why would we want to apply this title to Christ? Well, if we think again about the Gospel reading, we will find something to help us with this question. In this reading we heard Luke's account of the crucifixion of Christ: of his act of sacrifice for us, an ultimate act of leadership and the birth of God's new covenant with humanity. Surely this is a different model of what it means to be a king. God's own model of servant leadership. Here we encounter the Son of God sacrificing his life for his people. He may have been mocked as he was crucified, but ultimately, he is victorious. In the reading from Colossians Christ is described as the first born of all creation, and we are told that everything was created through him including "thrones or dominions or rulers or powers". So Christ holds authority over all kings: they are subservient to him, not the other way round.

The reading from Colossians continues on to say that through Christ, God reconciled himself with his creation, with us, "by making peace with the blood of his (Christ's) cross". Through his death we were rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of Christ, God's beloved son. He is Christ the King because he rescued us from sin, because he sacrificed himself and because he will come into his kingdom, a kingdom he invites us to join.

And this was recognised by the second criminal in his prayer "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom". To which Jesus replied: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise". Perhaps we should hold onto this prayer to help us see that Christ, the first born of creation, is truly the King of all, and that like the criminal we can be with him in paradise.