

JESUS IS KING

I was a stand-in for the wattle dance when the Queen came to Adelaide in 1953. We had all learnt the steps at primary school and we would go to the Showground Oval for the Royal visit. I still have the scrapbooks I made of all the English Royals. She and her Prince were lovely and I feasted on every bit of information in the Advertiser and on radio. Our national anthem was a prayer. Later in high school over 800 girls mimicked the headmistresses chant, 'I promise 'charfully' to obey her laws'. I saw royalty when I was 9 – our QE2.

Today we mark the end of the church year by crowning Jesus as King. Luke ends the liturgical year with a stunning portrayal of Jesus surrounded by the excluded and despised. Luke is the only author to give voice to the prisoners with whom Jesus dies. Jesus is no ordinary king – he is not vested in fine silks and jewels but in garments of humility and suffering. He is concerned not with power but with liberation. Perhaps the principal thing that distinguishes Jesus kingship from all others is his physical location – on a cross between prisoners. It is the supreme irony and paradox of a universal messiah reigning 'from the tree'. What kind of king winds up on a cross at a place called 'The Skull'?



Luke's Gospel has been loaded with surprises this year: the poor are rich, sinners find salvation, the Kingdom of God is found in our midst. And here is the greatest surprise of all. It is the inscription placed on his cross, perhaps in mockery, that contains the profoundest truth - JESUS IS KING. As the leaders cheer, the thief crucified by his side recognizes Jesus as Messiah and King and finds salvation. We realize that Jesus' extraordinary act of forgiveness is for each and all of us. 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

Jesus is King, but not the kind of king we might have imagined or expected. His kingship was hidden from many of his contemporaries, but those who had eyes of faith were able to see. As modern disciples of Jesus, we, too, struggle at times to recognize Jesus as King. Today's gospel invites us to make our own judgment.

How did Jesus bring about his kingdom? He did this as a shepherd who cares for his flock. He searches, he leads into pasture, he leads back home, he bandages the wounded. 'He is the great shepherd of the sheep and the protector of our souls.' Jesus is a caring King. Jesus is not a King according to earthly ways; for him to reign is not to command but to obey the Father.

Jesus is a crucified King and from his royal throne on the cross he extends his royal invitation to his subjects.' If anyone wants to follow me, he must pick up his own cross and become my disciple.'

It is a most unusual kingdom. The greatest in the kingdom are childlike. The weak conquer the strong, the foolish confound the wise. We add by subtracting and multiply by dividing. In the kingdom of God there is a continuing banquet – the Eucharist – and we participate in memory of Jesus. 'Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.'

The Gospel teaches us what God's kingdom requires of us. The great parable of the final judgment in Matthew 25 reads, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' The righteous will ask him, 'When did we do all this?' And he will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Note – it's not FOR me but TO me.

In the twilight of our lives we will be judged on our love for, closeness to and tenderness towards our fellow human beings. We are to be close in concrete ways and practical kindnesses. We do well to contemplate, 'Thy kingdom come.' We proclaim the kingdom not so much in words as in our lives.

Despite my best efforts QE2 was inaccessible to me. The amazing truth is that the King of Kings waits to hear from me. He is a King who is hungry, thirsty, sick, lonely, a foreigner, a prisoner, a stranger. He is in the discouraged loved one who cannot find a job; he is in the co-worker who has just lost her husband; he is in the friend who was recently diagnosed with cancer. We meet this King every day. When we care for them we care for Him.

Jesus is a caring and close King, a conquering King who never forces, a King who is hungry and thirsty, a King who reigns from a cross, a King who washes our feet, a King who comes to serve rather than to be served.

And in my ears is the 1953 sounds of, 'She's coming...' are almost drowned out by another cry of anticipation, 'The King is coming!' AMEN

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