

CHRIST THE TRUE KING

2 Samuel 23:1–7

Today is the festival of Christ the King. Jesus is king not just of the church but of the world—over everything that happens.

I remember when I went to be the Missioner at Coober Pedy in the 1980s, I had a clear sense that I was not going to make Jesus king of Coober Pedy. Coober Pedy already belonged to Jesus, on two accounts: Coober Pedy was made through him, and Coober Pedy had been bought by him at the cost of his own blood. So Jesus was already king of Coober Pedy. I was going there to tell people that—whether they liked it or not. There would be those who were glad that Jesus was in charge of Coober Pedy, and other who would keep up some resistance.

So today we are looking at what kind of rule Jesus exercises over the world that is his.

From the Old Testament reading today David, king of Israel 3,000 years ago, had something very important to tell us:

Now these are the last words of David.

When you are about to die, and you have something to say, it is likely that you are not going to waste your words. What you say will be highly significant for those you are saying it to. This is something that is going to be worth listening to.

Especially when it is not just anybody saying this, but a person of importance who has a right to be heard:

The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted,
the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favourite of the Strong One of Israel

Three times David is saying he speaks these words as one who has a special, if not unique, relationship with God. But David also makes clear

that these are not just his words. David insists, with a four-fold repetition, these are words that I got directly from God:

The spirit of the LORD speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me:

So it is not just David speaking to us here. In hearing what David says, we are listening to the voice of God. Are we a little bit interested? Are we ready to listen? Are we all ears? To hear what is God going to say to us through David? Here it is:

One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

Isn't that beautiful? So tender, and so strong. Proper ruling needs to be like the sun coming up in the morning, and like rain on the grass. So this statement, through David, from God, is a statement about ruling. David was a notable ruler. David says that God told him this—as the most important thing God told him. Would that be a good thing to tell to our rulers? All want a ruler like that. A ruler who serves the people for their good rather than a ruler who exploits the people for the ruler's good. Can we ask that, for instance, of Prime Minister Scott Morrison—that he be for us a ruler whose effect on us is like the sun coming up in the morning, and like rain on the grass?

What God says to David about proper ruling is not the way earthly rulers often are. Jesus summed it up this way:

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

In keeping with what God said to David, Jesus says we are to be different from that:

But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10:42–44).

Like the sun coming up in the morning, and like rain on the grass. Maybe that's why we still call our main leader the 'Prime Minister', which means 'first servant'. Where did David get this idea of ruling from? He got it from God. But not just from what God said to him, but from the way God is in Himself. Who is it who brings up the sun in the morning, and who sends the rain on the grass? It is God, ruling over His creation, by serving it. That is how God rules. God saying to David: That is how I rule over my whole creation, and that is how I want you to rule with Me.

So when God told us as a human race at the beginning:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (Gen. 1:28),

God meant us to exercise that dominion, that rule, with God, in the way God does. We are to be to creation like the sun coming up in the morning, and like rain on the grass. Not to rip it off, or exploit it, or devastate the earth, for our own advantage. We are to serve it and care for it with God, as God does, according to God's purpose for the earth.

And what is God's purpose for the earth? Well, what had God just done before God said that to us?

God *blessed* them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion . . ."

Fill the earth with what? With the blessing that God has just given us! Bless the earth with the blessing that we have received from God. God is saying to us: Take this relationship that you have with Me, and fill the earth with that. Take this knowledge and love you have of Me and of My glory and fill the earth with it. Bless the earth with the blessing that you have

from Me. Be like the sun coming up in the morning, and like the rain on the grass. That is how you are to have dominion, to rule the earth.

This relationship with God was not just something for the beginning, and we were to take over from there. No—this is for all the time—our ruling is to be never without God. That is how David knew it. David went on to say:

One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. *Is not my house like this with God?* For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire? (2 Sam. 23:3–5).

Is that how we know God to be for us? No reason why we shouldn't know God in that way, because that's the way God is.

Another thing God told David about ruling, that we also want rulers to do for us:

But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away; for they cannot be picked up with the hand; to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear. And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot. (2 Sam. 23:6–7).

What's that about? That is about dealing with evil, and removing it. That is why we expect our governments to have police forces, and courts, and prisons, and armed forces. To deal justly with evil and evil people, and remove the evil, while not getting corrupted by it. That is what is meant by 'they cannot be picked up with the hand; to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear'—we need to be able to deal with evil, while not getting caught up in it. That is quite a demanding requirement, and one that does not come easily. It needs great moral fibre and wise discernment.

Of course, this particular function of ruling—having to deal with evil—would not be necessary if we human beings had not decided to sin and do what the devil told us to. But now, that is a very necessary function of government. And it is one that God does too. God has undertaken to remove all trace of evil from His creation, by dealing with it justly, but

without ever condoning or coming to any compromise with it. So true rulers need to learn and be with God in that function too.

Problem is, our rulers invariably get caught up in the evil themselves, especially when there is no one but themselves that they have to answer to. The historian Lord Acton in the nineteenth century coined this axiom: 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. The very fact that we have had to build in so many checks and balances into our democratic system, so that no one person ever has absolute power, is testimony to that. That is why Jesus needed to say:

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10:42–44).

In the gospel reading, we heard Jesus telling Pilate that Jesus' kingdom or ruling was not like what we generally find in the world.

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 (John 19:36)

Jesus' kingdom—his rule over all things—was not a grab for power, as it would be if it was a worldly kingdom. The way Jesus rules is not from this world. So where is it from? It is from God. So it will be a kingdom that rules in God's way—by serving those over whom it rules. Like the sun coming up in the morning, and like the rain on the grass.

And also, in the way it deals with evil. When Jesus said, 'whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all', he went on to say: 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). There we have it: 'not to be served but to serve'—ruling God's way. But what about this 'ransom'? What is a ransom? A ransom is a high price paid to set someone free. The first time I came

across what a ransom is was when I heard the story of King Richard the Lionheart: he was on his way home from the crusades when he got captured and was kept locked up in a castle until England could pay the large ransom price to release him. Kidnappers today demand a ransom price—sometimes in the millions of dollars. But Jesus' 'ransom' was not just for one person, but 'for many'—for all of us. What do we need to be set free from? From sin, that has us in its grip, and from the devil, whose will we have bound ourselves to, and from the wrath of God against all that is evil and wrong, and from death that is the judgement on our sin. All that is going to demand a very high price. God in His dealing with the evil under His rule will not compromise with it or condone one little bit of it. All evil and sin, with all who are tied up in it, will need to receive what is justly deserved. We are not able to pay that price. Jesus pays it in full himself—with his life—in his bearing of all sin and facing in that the full force of God's condemnation due to us sinners—Jesus is there for us, one with us, in the Father's love for us—to set us free. That is something we could never do for ourselves. That is something Jesus has done fully for us. What a blessing! Like the sun coming up for us on a new day, with all the newness and freshness of rain on the grass. That is how Jesus rules. That is how Christ is King.

Years ago in the 1980s when I was in the church at Coober Pedy, I used to visit and minister in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yunkuntjatjara Lands in the far north-west of our State with the local Christians there. One Pitjantjatjara Christian elder told me his story. He said: 'I used to be a church man . . .'—you know what 'a church man' is, don't you? Someone who does 'church' things, that maybe help to keep the church going. Nothing wrong with that, I suppose. But I suspect there's got to be a lot more to it than just that. So my elder friend said, 'I used to be a church man. But one Easter we had a convention here in our community, and I heard the evangelist say that Jesus took away all my sins. And I thought, if he could do that, he must be Lord of all!' Another way of saying: he is the true ruler. Jesus is the true king from God. Like the sun coming up in the morning, and like rain on the grass.

We say today Christ is King, and we look around and sometimes wonder if that is really so. Over everything that is going on in the world now. Christ's kingship is not always something we can see. Sometimes perhaps it shines through—like in 1989 when, in answer to decades of praying, the Berlin Wall came down—no one expected that to happen. Mind you, looking at what has happened since in Russia and elsewhere, that was not an unmixed blessing. World affairs are so complicated—where is the power and the wisdom that can handle it all? Christ's kingship is something that we need to know within ourselves first, before we go looking for it elsewhere. We need to know it for ourselves, as David did: 'Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure'. We need to let it impact us, as my Pitjantjatjara elder friend did: 'Jesus took away all my sins. If he could do that, he must be Lord of all!' When we are in that position, I believe we can look on everything else, however complicated, with a measure of equanimity—even joy—like the sun coming up in the morning, and like rain on the grass.