

Colossians 1:11-20

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Luke 23:33-43

33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.

34 Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.'

36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar

37 and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence?'

41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'

42 Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

43 Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

Christ the King Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

I always find it interesting at this time of year that the Anglican calendar brings up the theme of Christ the King, and so just before Christmas when we celebrate Jesus coming as a baby, we have to think about him as the King and the one *through whom all things were created*.

That before he was born, he was involved in creation from the start. Really. That's something that should always make us stop and think.

The idea of a Royal King (or Queen), on a throne, in fine robes and crown jewels, with great power to rule his kingdom, is something we've lost in a modern democracy where the ones with power are not the monarch but politicians, or the technocrats of the EU, or increasingly it seems, the bankers and billionaires and corporations, who seem only to be concerned with profit at the expense of everything else.

We need to think again about the meaning of the word King. King: a a male monarch of a major territorial unit especially : one whose position is hereditary and who rules for life who rules for life. But what did it mean to those among whom Jesus lived? Well the kings put in by Rome were pretty despicable and corrupt but also very powerful.

So e have to think about this extraordinary contradiction:

A carpenter from a first century village in Galilee who declares himself to be king over all the earth (Matt 25:34)
The Jews of Jesus' time believed their God to be just that: A God among gods. For Jewish believers then this was the pinnacle of belief. There was only one true God.
How could there possibly be more than one?
And Jews couldn't even mention his name.
The problem with Jesus was that he kept placing himself on the same level with God, with Yahweh, the unmentionable God.
And as we saw in our gospel reading, he felt able to tell a criminal convicted of the death sentence that he would that same day be with him, Jesus, in paradise.
And above his head on the cross was a mocking sign saying: 'The King of the Jews', as if he could possibly have the nerve to believe that he was somehow Special. According to the crowd, who knew no better, He was a blasphemer and fully deserved the death sentence. He didn't behave like a King. He spent all his time with bad people. Tax collectors, publicans, prostitutes. Sinners. He offered hope to all the wrong people. He forgave those who didn't deserve forgiveness. Outrageous! At least according to the religious leaders. Would our judgement be any better now as to who we would trust? I don't think it would.
If we're serious about Jesus we too will be accused of hanging around with the wrong people, and just as likely by other Christians.

In the book *Lord of the Rings* the hobbit Pippin in a rash moment gives his allegiance to 'King' Denethor who is in fact not the king at all. Just a stand in for the real thing. He regrets this move at leisure when he realises that the real nature of the person he has sworn to serve is very different to what he expected.
Jesus is also very different to what we might expect, but in a good way.
Jesus fulfils the real meaning of the word King and it's only by looking at him that we can understand what a true King is.
And it matters that we can recognise the signs of a true king. It's important to understand who exactly Jesus is.
He is in his very nature God, as Paul says, *the image of the invisible God*, but at the same time He is one of us, that is, he is a man who lived a life exactly as we do, but who now has been resurrected to a new life beyond death.
And so when we are resurrected we will also be as He is now. He promises this to every one of us who follows him, To everyone of us who makes him central to what we do.
But Is that how we see him?
Or is he more of a figurehead in the way we see the Queen? Kings or Queens have great fame and respect but they don't really have any impact on our daily lives.
We're not in a close relationship to them. They don't live ordinary lives.

Jesus calls us to let go of all the things which prevent us from being the people we were intended to be. But it's not until you've really said yes to him that you begin to realise what that means and how it will transform your life.

Real freedom comes to those who do as he asks.

The fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James and John dropped everything and followed him but they didn't in their wildest imaginings bargain for what happened in the next 3 years.

The Kingdom he wants us to be part of is something entirely different to the kingdom we live in now.

Life takes a different shape with Jesus around, as the disciples discovered. Anything can happen.

And what is the practical outworking of Christ being our King?

If we have the wrong image of Jesus, our actions will not be those of true followers. We must know our King.

So what is the attitude he hopes to see in us?

Do those who like to be seen doing good grow as people?

Do those who worship money and material things ultimately achieve peace?

Are those who seek power and influence ever satisfied?

I was struck by a comment by Eric Clapton in his recent autobiographical film when he said, "I'm proud of what I've achieved musically, but it's all dust really"

Jesus kingdom is not one of worldly success but one of humility and service, and of speaking truth in the face of power and success.

Jesus did great things and taught great things but they were not done so that he would be seen as great. They were done out of love for others and to set them free to live a more fruitful life.

This is how the King himself behaves, and our calling is to do the same. We must love because we love.

Not for any ulterior motive.

This is the King we worship.

in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

And this is who we crucified.

And yet out of the cross comes all our hope

And salvation

And peace

And joy

And fulfilment

And life as God intended us to live it.

So we're asked to come to the cross

and receive life

Amen