

## **Sermon preached by the Rev'd Glenn Maytum**

24<sup>th</sup> November 2019

### **CHRIST THE KING**

I think, in our modern world and especially in liberal democracies like Australia, we are not sure how we should respond to royalty and to kings and queens, in particular.

Recently, I was in London and it was the day of the Queen's speech to open parliament. So, I took my position on the edge of The Mall in order to watch the pageantry and to see the Queen pass by in her coach; and, I was pleased to be there: alongside all the other foreigners (like me) who were there. As an Aussie I was standing next to Americans (from Illinois) on one side and a Pakistani family on the other.

The Queen may be a constitutional necessity, but we all treated her like any other celebrity.

And, as I wait at the checkout at Woolies', my eyes are drawn to the front covers of the magazines waiting to be purchased and I can say the Royal Family gets quite some attention in these magazines!

Kings and Queens, princesses and princes are treated like any other celebrity. They take their place alongside film stars and sports people. We refer to players and actors as film, football or racing royalty. For example, this is the anniversary of Freddie Mercury, the former lead singer of "Queen"; ABBA sang about "The Dancing Queen"; The advertisements on Martin Place Station inform me Noni Hazelhurst is in a stage play about a beauty queen; Rafael Nadal is known as "the comeback king"; Shane Warne is the "king of spin"; we even have the Basketball Kings here in Sydney!

We can either treat them all as irrelevant, or they can become models for behaviour (what will the footy off-season bring, this year?)

So then, what do WE mean when today we say "Christ is our King?"

Is Christ basically irrelevant to the way we conduct ourselves as Christians?

I think, for Christ, the first and most obvious thing is that we have to change our understanding about kings and queens from how royalty are viewed in twenty-first century liberal democracies. I think it is ABSOLUTELY clear that Christ is fundamental to the way we live our lives as Christians.

A King or Queen is an optional extra when it comes to living in a liberal democracy. We see this in next-door neighbours of Canada and the United States. Both are liberal democracies and one has a Queen and the other totally rejects the idea.

But, Christ is NOT an optional extra when it comes to being a Christian.

Christ's kingship is nothing like the way kingship is perceived in the modern world.

Most active Christians in Australia are happy to proclaim Christ as their King, regardless of their attitude to whether they want Australia to remain a constitutional monarchy, or not.

So, there must be some sort of idea of what a 'king' is that lies at the foundation of our understanding of what it means to call Christ our King.

We need to look a long way into the past to see anything like that for which we search. We need to go beyond the English Civil War of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century to have any experience of what it was like to live under the rule of a secular king who had real power in his person.

Probably, when we think of an analogy for the type of kingship Christ exercises we need to get back to the time when Christ walked around Galilee and Judea. The absolute power of the Emperor of Rome would be getting close to it. David Runia of the Australian Catholic University says "The Roman Emperors ... [had] the entire resources of the state at their disposal and unrestricted power." They had the real power of life and death over all in the empire. They were the ruler of all they SURVEYED.

But, our understanding of the kingship of Christ is even more than this.

Rather than being the ruler of all He surveys, Christ, as the hymn says, is Lord of all CREATION (474 New English Hymnal). He is the One from whom even the emperor derived his power!

St Paul says in our Colossians reading today...

*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. (Col 1:13-19)*

Although they are overused words we can *literally* say, to enter the presence of Christ is awesome.

The Lord of all creation, the Saviour of the World, is not just another celebrity!

Today is the last Sunday in the Christian year. Today is the day we have been heading for, all year. Next week we begin the story and journey all over again- this time with Matthew.

In our final text from Luke's Gospel we see Luke proclaim the Kingship of Christ. But, it is a paradox, again.

All year, in Luke's writing, we have seen **radical reversals**: stuff, which on the face of it, just doesn't make sense.

And, here today, we have Christ proclaimed as King- but, NOT as a glorious enthronement, but as a broken man upon the Cross! The Kingship of Christ is revealed in the moment of deepest HUMILIATION.

Throughout Luke's gospel Jesus seeks out and saves the lost. We read stories of the lost sheep, lost coin, women, the prodigal son, lepers and finally, it is a common criminal, rightly condemned, who proclaims the Kingdom Jesus is to inhabit.

And, what happens? True to form, the compassionate Jesus of Luke's gospel assures him of salvation! Luke wants everyone to know that Jesus came to bring salvation to ALL. The baby whom we soon adore at Christmas is the One who, as the reading today says, died on the cross for us and for our salvation.

For us, here at St James' each time we come to this church we are reminded that WE are entering the awesome presence of our Lord and King. This is no ordinary space. The bicentenary reminds us

this space has been set aside from the ordinary world. It has been dedicated and solemnly consecrated. Here, along with all those who, each day, each week, come quietly in to kneel and pray, we are reminded that the kings of this world came to kneel beside the cradle of Jesus.

When we enter this space we are reminded that the story of our salvation is not just a cute, sentimental story from long ago.

Here, we consciously acknowledge in liturgy, song and prayer, with all wise people, that Christ is King!