

Are You the King?

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Luke 23:33-43

The story is told of Her late Majesty who was out shopping one day in Ballater – already quite an image in itself. On meeting a woman in the shop, the woman remarked to her: “You look just like the Queen.” To which the Queen is said to have replied, “How reassuring.” Presumably with that legendary twinkle in her eye.

On another occasion she is reported to have said, “I can’t wear beige because people won’t know who I am.”

I wonder if King Charles will have the same issue. It’s hard to go about anonymously if you are recognised everywhere you go. But being recognised is not necessarily the same thing as being known.

One of the interesting facts in the Bible is that there is no physical description of what Jesus looked like. We don’t know His height, build, hair or eye colour. He’d have been known around Nazareth, and the villages on the shore of Lake Galilee. He was known in Bethany. Maybe one or two might have recognised Him in Jerusalem, but beyond that? Yet the world has been talking about Him, arguing about Him, wondering about Him for two thousand years.

Pontius Pilate, interrogating Jesus in the praetorium, the governor’s residence in Jerusalem, asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?” There was another occasion when Jesus challenged His followers with His question, “But Who do you say that I am?”

As we come to what is described as the end of the Christian year, knowing what we think about Jesus, and who we think He is remains at the heart of our belief? Is He teacher, healer and miracle worker? Is He first century peasant, son of Mary, son of Joseph, Son of God? Is He friend and

companion? Is He the fulfilment of prophecies like that of Jeremiah, who looks for a true shepherd, the heir of Israel's great King David, who will be a wise king, full of justice and doing right by the children of God? Is He Saviour, and Redeemer, and God with us? Will the real Jesus please stand up?

What are the qualities to be looked for in the kingship of Jesus? What should His kingdom look like? What rules will govern it.

In these last months as we have gone through more Prime Ministers and senior Government ministers than a pantomime dame going through costume changes. There was a time when the memories of older people were tested to assess their grip on current events by asking them, 'And who is the Prime Minister?' I tried it a few weeks ago in a nursing home and was told, "Not funny!" by someone who had all her marbles about her.

The question of leadership has rarely been out of the headlines. I wonder if political leaders, of any and every political party, might steal a glance at the leadership of Jesus. Before we lose Him for a while under the swaddling cloths and tinsel, what does this servant king really look like? Maybe that's part of the answer – this King comes as a servant. This King, born in a stable, living amongst the peasant folk of Galilee but unafraid I in the company of High Priests and Roman Governors and Jewish kings, knelt to wash the feet of His friends. This King Who came to live not in power but in humility, Whose birth we will remember in a few weeks, but Whose sacrifice and death, and intimation of resurrection is in our reading from Luke today is enthroned not in a palace, but on a cross.

We usually hear this passage on Good Friday, but it sits well enough at any time of the year as we bring to mind that the Christ-child of Bethlehem did not stay frozen in time in a manger but ended His earthly days dying on a cross at Golgotha, between two thieves. Beaten, bruised, naked,

humiliated, broken, betrayed and abandoned. For no crime, except He taught hope and justice too much, and healed and comforted too much, and challenged authority too much, and forgave too much, and loved too much. This Jesus, this servant, this king.

Are You the King? This perplexing, troubling, glorious Man Who turned the norms of power and position upside down, and showed what true leadership should look like, and what true leadership should do and be.

Are there leaders like that in human history? The Nelson Mandelas, and Martin Luther Kings, and the Queen Elizabeths.

In that service last week in St Margaret's Chapel there was a lovely few words that struck a chord. She showed charity towards all; by her humility and kindness made clear the way of royal service. That's wonderful. Not just for the leaders in the high places of life, but for all of us.

We may not be kings and queens in the genealogy of royalty, but we are called, too, to show charity towards all; to be humble and kind to show what our following in the footsteps of our Saviour, King Jesus, does in our lives.

The example we set in front of children and young people. The example we set in front of our colleagues at work and our neighbours around us. The example we set in Church and charities, and towards strangers we meet. The example we set to people who need our help and our forgiveness and our kindness and our love.

Next week, at a coffee morning for the Clothing Store, and at our Gift service. Next week, at the Morningside Hope concert. In the weeks to come, with the Christmas tree festival, and its setting up (and taking down!). At the services in Church where strangers may find a seat beside us and look for no more than a smile. And in that, catch the glimmer of a likeness to the Jesus Who is our King and our Friend and our Light and our Hope.

At Calvary many couldn't see Who Jesus really was. Some blinded by tears and grief. Some mocking and ridiculing. It was the penitent robber, hanging on a cross by His side, who said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."

That criminal, who knew what he had stolen, in his dying moments, saw something, recognised something, in the rejected Man on the neighbouring cross. He saw, I think, the King.

And when he saw, and spoke of what he saw, he was rewarded with an invitation to Paradise.

Jesus, dying on the cross, stakes His life with the lonely, the sick, the poor, the hurting, the broken hearted – with all of us. Through the sweat and blood, the thorns and nails, the mockery and humiliation, the burning fire of God's love in Jesus remains.

And because it remains, so we, needing to be reminded of this great truth of the Christian faith, can be the leaders in big ways and small ways in our world today.

Yes, hold our politicians and economists, our educational chiefs and leading lawyers, our business people and entrepreneurs, our heads of charities and armed forces, our Moderators, ministers, Popes and archbishops to account as the lead and seek to influence our worlds.

But see too the place where your leadership in the daily things you do, the places where you go where your thoughts, your words and your actions can heal or harm, can darken or brighten. And at such times, remember this Messiah on the cross, this King Who serves, this Saviour Who will welcome us into paradise when our time comes. And on this day, and every day, give thanks for the Servant King, the Friend of all, the daily example of kindness that we too must emulate.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen