

CHRIST THE KING. Jeremiah 23:1-6

Most of you know that we had a daughter called Bethany. When she was 19, she went into a diabetic coma and was on life support for 2 weeks. At one point during that time, the tracheotomy in her throat dislodged as she coughed, and she stopped breathing. Her heart also stopped. She flatlined and had to be resuscitated. Jay was with her at the time.

Bethany later wrote about this experience in the annual parish magazine. Let me read it to you:

“You must all know me. Thank you for your prayers while I was sick. They worked pretty well. But I will tell you a bit more about myself. I am 19, my favourite food is spaghetti and I love primary colours. I love to read, listen to Christian music, and Britney Spears music. My favourite things are dolls and animals.

While I was sick, I felt God was there. I felt warm and safe.

One day I was really, really sick. I was kind of awake, but I was in a passageway with a light at the end of it. I felt floaty - like I was flying. There were scary things all around me. I felt afraid, but God would not let the scary things near me.



Then I felt someone sit on the edge of my bed. I looked to see who it was and it was Jesus. His voice was soft, like an angel. He said he was with me; he said the same things he said to Lazarus. He cuddled me and said, “I’ll heal you.” I felt safe and warm, like nothing would ever hurt me.

I drew this picture: (slide)

It’s an unexpected picture, isn’t it? Aside from being a budding Picasso, notice that Bethany has drawn Jesus not as a shepherd or as a healer in a flowing robe but as a King! I know what an awe-inspiring encounter it was for her, because I was with her when she finally recovered consciousness. I’ll always remember awe-struck the look on her face when she mouthed the words, “I saw Jesus.”

How do we normally picture Jesus? I often find myself thinking of him as my friend & guide - someone who walks the journey of life with me, sometimes beside me - sometimes ahead of me and always as someone who talks with me, counselling me on the way.

That may be your image of Jesus also. Some people think of Jesus primarily in terms of a friend, or as a good shepherd - someone who seeks out the lost and injured sheep and carries the wounded and the lame on his shoulders till they are safe back in the fold. I rather like that image as well.

I imagine that if we were to take a survey here this morning, the image of Jesus as a King would not be the most common one.

Yet it was for claiming to be a King that Jesus was tried and sentenced to death. The sign above the cross said "This is the King of the Jews."

What is this kingdom, this realm, that Jesus rules?

It began with the creation of the world. In Genesis, we read the story of Creation. Whether you believe that story to be literal or figurative, it says the same thing - the earth is God's creation and God is King.

God delegated authority over the earth to humankind, though they were still accountable to him. Sadly they rebelled, & humanity has been rebelling ever since. The consequence of that rebellion was separation from God and exclusion from his kingdom. Sin entered the world. We became flawed, and death took hold.

God of course loved us too much to leave us outside his kingdom. Through the Old Testament, we have the story of a nation, a people, to whom God chose to reveal himself, and through whom God sought to bring a fallen humanity back to himself. This was to be through the nation of Israel living in faithful obedience to God, and sharing his love with the surrounding nations.

Israel of course, was never able to remain faithful. Time and again, she 'committed adultery' as it were, going after other nations' gods, which resulted in God withdrawing his protection, and his people being conquered.

By the time of Jeremiah, in our Old Testament reading this morning, Israel had again been attacked by her enemies and was disintegrating before the prophet's eyes.

Jeremiah was given a vision from God. He looked through his own long, dark tunnel into the light of a new age. In it, there were two elements. The first was a promise that God would restore Israel's fortunes in the here and now:

1. *"I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all [the] countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase" (Jer 23:3).*

The second promise was that God would establish a new kingdom through sending a righteous king - not a flawed or corrupt human king - who would be a descendant of King David

2. *"I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness, a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth" (Jer 23:5).*

This king was Jesus. He would be God's perfect King, and he would reign for eternity. The prophet Isaiah said of him:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

With the coming of Jesus, God's eternal king, a new era began. God came among his people in the person of his Son. Jesus preached, *"The time has come! The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God offers restoration of his kingdom through forgiveness of sin, the coming of his Spirit, and the gift of eternal life for all those who bring themselves under his reign. It is not a physical kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom. God's kingdom starts now, in the hearts of his people, and will find completion when Jesus finally returns to bring about the end of the age.

So - that's the the Kingdom of God in a nutshell and it's a theme that permeates each of the 66 books of the Bible.

The question for us, is where are we in relation to God's Kingdom?

In our contemporary world, the meaning of king has become rather diluted. In fact we use the word more as an advertising slogan than anything else...

king prawns, king sized beds, Burger King....

When it comes to thinking of **Christ** as King, the simple fact is that many of us have difficulty with that concept. It's not so much that the metaphor is obscure or that it conjures up images that are inadequate - we all have a fair idea of what it would mean to be the servant of a king.

The real problem is **that the concept of someone other than myself being in control of my life**, is uncomfortable.

When we picture Jesus as our friend, as our shepherd, as our brother, as one who comes to us a healer and a teacher we accentuate in our minds the love and the grace and the goodness of Jesus, it makes Jesus - "user friendly". That image of Jesus is much easier for people to accept - and much easier to ignore!

It's the image of Jesus as LORD/KING/RULER that causes people problems.

Given our tendency to want autonomy and independence, you'd think that God would throw his weight around a little, wouldn't you? Insist on our obedience. Punish us when we rebel. Pull this slack church of his into line.

But as Jesus said to Pilate, his kingdom was not of this world. The way God's Kingdom operates is totally different from anything in our earthly experience. It is a kingdom of sacrificial love.

As our King - Jesus is not in our face. He gives us our freedom. He treats us as his friends. We can stay by his throne feasting when we like the fare, and we can dine out when it's not so palatable. And so we lose track of the fact that doing what he wants us to do really might be good for us, - and of the fact that not doing what he wants might not be so good for us. We sometimes grow far too comfortable with our pleasant images of Christ, and we lose sight of the need for obedience to him in our daily lives.

Yet I would venture to say that "obedience" is not the essence of the Christian faith. **Relationship** is.

Jesus taught that it wasn't the letter of the law that we should obey, but rather the SPIRIT of the law. He summarised the whole law into just two – love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself. Those two commandments speak of a **relationship** – a relationship of immense Love.

IF we love God with every fibre of our being – and IF, because we love God like that, we love our fellow human beings as much as we love ourselves – we find we have already obeyed the ten commandments. It comes naturally.

“If you love me,” said Jesus, “You will obey my commands.” One follows the other.

Christ the King Sunday in our church calendar is a valuable reminder of the place that Jesus Christ should occupy in the life of his servants as individuals, and in the life of his church as his body.

It is a reminder that we are called into his Kingdom, to both love him and to obey him; and in so doing, become living communities of His kingdom on earth until he comes again.

If we are aware that we have stepped away from his rule, if we are living our lives without reference to him, then Jesus calls us back to kneel before him, our God and King.

Let's pray