

Luke 23:33-43

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³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." ³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

In the name of Father, son and Holy Spirit

Welcome

Intro

Well, my first opportunity to be a part of the preaching ministry at this parish and Its Christ the King Sunday

'King!'

I have mixed feelings about the word king and the whole royalty thing. I'm not into royals or royal weddings. Not really into glossy mags with royal baby pics, But I'm not judging its just not my thing.

It seems to be saying to me – by an accident of birth, you are a royal and are more deserving and special than everyone else. But I guess that's what much of life is like, including us as privileged first world Australians. Accidents of birth.

Yes I've always been fond of that bit of Monty Python and the Holy Grail where King Arthur asks directions from some locals

"ARTHUR: I am your king!

WOMAN: Well, I didn't vote for you.

ARTHUR: You don't vote for kings.

WOMAN: Well, 'ow did you become king then?

ARTHUR: The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water signifying by Divine Providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. That is why I am your king!

DENNIS: Listen -- strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony."

And on they go.

But the mention of divine providence suggests God plays some part. And God certainly does in our gospel reading today.

But wait a minute - if it's Christ the king Sunday, why do we have this reading? Jesus is at his lowest ebb He's been beat up and is in the process of being destroyed. There's no finery or royal robes. He's in a loin cloth or less depending on who you believe, bloodied and filthy.

The mentions of Jesus as king we have in this passage are all about the Romans mocking Jesus. Notice that the first two times the passage uses the term 'saying'

- The leaders scoffed at him, saying,
- The soldiers also mocked him, ...saying,

The experts tell me that the word translated as 'saying' in the Greek uses the same verb as the word "mocked" in verse 36.

This is our king? The one being made fun of?

Well here in lies the point of this choice as the passage for today. Jesus is not the king you'd expect.

So, if this passage is a guide to how kings act then what do we see here

1. Jesus as king is sacrificial. He gives up his life rather than fight for it. Christians have come to understand this as Jesus dying for us, to save us.

2. Jesus as king meets the needs of those around him, even in his final moments. In the 11th station of the cross where is that on the wall here??? He gives truth to the thief who saw the truth in him: "You're going to end up in paradise."
3. Jesus as king doesn't use violence, he uses non violence. There are no angelic armies intervening to rescue him from the cross. He doesn't break his bonds like some superhero and wreak revenge on the Romans who've done this to him.
4. Jesus seeks to understand others even in his final moments. He forgives the people who don't understand what they're doing. That's the Romans and the Judeans who've put him on the cross. "Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." Every time I hear that it sends a chill up my spine.

For me, when I read the bible I often wonder, who am I most like in this text? What is God saying to me? And when I hear "Father forgive them" I find myself as one of the ones who needs to be forgiven.

So Jesus as king? He's a humble sacrificial servant.

Now a couple of asides

In this story they mention giving Jesus some vinegar to drink. Vinegar! Those rotten Romans giving him something nasty to drink when he's in such a terrible way, slowly dying. But history tells us that the word we translate as vinegar might actually be "the mixture of sour wine or vinegar and water which the Roman soldiers were accustomed to drink." So it seems to me that the question is 'why they would give him wine' is more of an issue than that they gave him bad wine. So why give wine? It might have actually been to sustain him and to make the crucifixion last longer.

Secondly Jesus tells the thief "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Today??? But isn't Jesus in the tomb for three days before his resurrection? And then on earth for a while with the disciples before the ascension?

But do you know this is a whole controversy in two points? Where was the comma supposed to be? Have a look at the verse in your pewsheets. Verse 43 - Truly I tell you the truth, today you'll be with me in paradise" So is it as the bible translates it? Or is the comma in the wrong place! "Truly I tell you the truth today COMMA, you'll be with me in paradise. Then there's the scandal of the thief getting into paradise without saying the sinners prayer. In evangelical circles they have to do significant work to make sense of that.

But back to paradise there's a Jewish idea of paradise that is not the same as heaven, blah blah . Three days or today: does it matter? It might take your interest as trivia and you can google the issue to find some answers but it shouldn't be a distraction away from the central issue here. If Jesus redefines the term 'king' as a person who suffers, and serves others what does that mean for us?

One writer summarised the issue as a question...

Do we live in God's kingdom, or Caesars?

You get the point. Do we follow Jesus example as the aim of our lives or the way of life that the world pushes us into?

It's easy to follow the world's way. The world wants us to be selfish. It wants us to focus on ourselves, our careers, our desires – YOU ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON! EVERYTHING IS ABOUT YOU! SATISFY YOURSELF AT ALL TIMES! OR at least most of the time. You can do one good deed for the day but after that, be selfish!

Jesus as king suggests something different. He tells us, "Your place on the earth is important, otherwise I wouldn't have put you here but are you the MOST important person? No. Are you more important than most others? No.

Should you put others first? Yes

All the time? Yes.

In the aisle at the supermarket? Yes

When it's time to do the washing up? Yes

When the best is being given out? Yes, put others first.

When someone needs help but it would take some effort and time to do it? For instance "Ahh I could stop and help that person change their tyre but then I'll be late and crease up my clothes.."

Yes, put others first.

The way of the king is the way of the servant.

The WOMAN in the monty python movie asked: "Well, 'ow did you become king then?"

How? Jesus did it by serving others.

And that's what we need to do too.