

Come: Consider Your King

*A sermon for the Feast of Christ the King by Vivian Grice, 24 November 2024
preached for the South Yarra Community Baptist Church*

Introduction:

I was born May 30 1953 in the UK. Three days later, on 2 June 1953, Queen Elizabeth II's coronation took place. This year her successor, King Charles III, visited Australia. Whatever our view about the British monarchy, and personally I am a republican, "kings" and "queens" are somewhat anachronistic in today's world. Currently there are only 43 out of the 195 nations in the world today that have a "king" or queen as head of state.

Yet today, in this last Sunday before Advent, we are celebrating a festival labelled "Christ the King". One theologian has commented that "... one of the key themes of Advent is not the anticipation of Christmas, but the anticipation of Jesus' return as king; the Latin *adventus* is a translation of the Greek παρουσία (1 Thess. 2.19, 3.13, 4.15, 5.23 and through the NT), which means the coming of the king or emperor to be present in the midst of his people." ¹ So on the cusp of Advent, the season of the year that looks to Jesus' first, **then** final coming, we pause to think about Jesus as King .

As I said before, we do not commonly think about "kings" ruling us today. Often they are largely figureheads of state. Yet in Jesus' day, kings or Caesars or emperors or pharaohs were the most common pattern of government. They were predominantly autocrats, with powers of life and death over their subjects. And it was a pattern that appears in Scripture; with an important difference.

God as King

Although none of the four readings for today from the lectionary directly refer to it, for the Israelites from Moses to the entry into the promised land, **God** was their king. In 1 Samuel 8 we read the story of the people petitioning Samuel the judge to appoint them a king "like other nations" (8:4 NRSV Updated Edition). Samuel is upset. He prays about it. The Lord's reply is important:

"... they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me
from being king over them." (8:7 NRSV UE)

So, although Samuel obeyed God and appointed the people a king, it came with a prophetic warning. It was this: kings would often misuse and abuse power. It was a warning of considerable, regrettably truthful, gravity.

¹ <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/preaching-on-christ-the-king/>
Accessed Nov 19 2024

David as King

So when we come to our first reading for today, 2 Samuel 23:1 – 7, it is important to note that it includes a comment by God, through Israel's second king, David the shepherd, on the blessings that can come when a king rules well:

“One who rules over people justly,
ruling in the fear of God,
4 is like the light of morning,
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.” (23:3 NRSV UE)

By any measure, David was a profoundly imperfect king. However, in his reign and in his person, there were prophetic glimpses of God's perfect kingship that Israel had rejected. In verse 5, David talks about an “everlasting covenant” made by God with him and his descendants as kings. Our second reading similarly refers to God's oath that David's descendants would “forevermore ... sit on [David's] throne.” (Psalm 132:12 NRSV UE).

Tragically for Israel, with a few exceptions, the succeeding kings did not rule over the people justly. They failed to rule “in the fear of God”. Rather, than act as stewards under God, they reigned in the way Samuel warned the people that kings would.

And when we look at many rulers in our contemporary world, whether they are labelled kings or not, often we see similar self-serving rather than nation-serving behaviour.

Jesus as King

Fast forward nearly a thousand years. We encounter Jesus the Galilean preacher-prophet. He is arraigned before another ruler. Jesus of Nazareth stands before Pontius Pilate. Pilate represents *the* most powerful potentate of the day, the Caesar, king or emperor, of the Roman Empire. Arraigned on trumped-up charges, Jesus is on trial for his life. And one of the questions fired at him by Pilate is this:

“Are you the king of the Jews?” (John 18:33 NRSV UE)

Now in some ways this is a curious question. For only rarely in the gospels is Jesus presented as a king. At his birth the Magi come looking for the “king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). His donkey-ride entry into Jerusalem is declared to be fulfillment of a prophecy about Zion receiving her king in that way (Matthew 21:5). At the cross he is mocked as the “King of the Jews.” (John 19:1)

Yet it is only in response to Pilate's question that Jesus overtly declares his kingship:

“Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:37 NRSV UE)

And it is fitting that the same gospel writer, John, opens his apocalyptic writing with this greeting:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the *ruler of the kings of the earth.*” (Revelation 1:4 – 5 NRSV UE)

Here, in Jesus, is the clearest portrayal of God’s perfect kingship. It is re-presented against the backdrop of Israel’s imperfect kings. It is lifted up in the face of all the limitations of other earthly kings. Here is Christ the King, who, we are reminded in Advent, will one day come again. Here is Christ the king who is the ultimate authority over all earthly powers, autocrats or potentates, no matter how powerful.

Now, pause for a moment to consider the nature of this king’s kingdom, the character of his rule. Jesus declared, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” (John 18:36 NRSV UE). Commonly this is translated as “not *of* this world. This is often taken to “mean that his kingdom is other-worldly, in the sense of being ethereal, or spiritual, and somehow detached from the realities of culture and politics and the nitty-gritty of everyday life.” ² This is not the case. Rather this verse points to the source of the Christ’s Kingdom. Yes, it is a spiritual kingdom yet it has earthly implications. Its source is the will of God, not the wielding of a sword, nor the vote of a populace. But it will interact with the nitty-gritty, everyday lives of people. It has economic and political implications.

Furthermore, this king’s sovereignty is displayed through service and sacrifice. As Revelation 1 expresses it:

“To him [be glory] who loves us and freed^[a] us from our sins by his blood ...”

All Hail King Jesus!

Pilate’s response to Jesus’ use of the metaphor of himself as a king is one of cynicism:

“*What is truth?*”

What is to be our response to this awareness of Christ the King?

² Ian Paul accessed at <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/preaching-on-christ-the-king/> November 20 2024

First, Christ's kingship, and especially the nature of it, invites me to **adore him**. In a few weeks' time we will possibly be singing that traditional Christmas hymn "O Come All Ye Faithful". It is a summons, an invitation, for the followers of Christ the King to

"Come and behold Him born the King of angels.

O come let us adore him

O come let us adore him

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord."

This festival of Christ the King invites, indeed calls for, our worship, our love, our adoration of Jesus.

Second, Christ the King challenges me to reflect upon **how I use power**.

Leadership inevitably is an issue of power. When I consider Christ as King I see him wield power for the benefit of others not for the benefit of Himself; for the glory of God not for his own aggrandisement. How different that is to what we frequently see. If we glance across our culture today, to rulers across the globe, politics, corporations, or even churches, we often see power wielded selfishly. None of us are kings. Yet to a greater or lesser degree, we all have power. How do I exercise whatever power I possess? To control or to enable? To lift up self, or to lift up others? To inhibit or to expand? To contain or to liberate?

Third, Christ the King calls me to **serve in his work in the world**. In verse 6 of our final reading from Rev. 1:6 – 8, there is this intriguing phrase:

"made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father ..."

Christ the King reigns over a kingdom alternative to any in the world then and now. And a kingdom is essentially the people in it. That is you and me, if we follow Jesus. We are the kingdom. We are called to the priestly function of mediating God to the world and the world to God. Even as Jesus worked in the world, so must we. We are not to simply be passive pietists, but passionate priests!

Fourth, this title reminds me that following Jesus **has political implications**. The very title "king" is a political one. Politics deals with power; its use in the world. Politics concerns issues of justice and injustice; distribution of resources to meet needs; control and freedom; individual rights and communal responsibilities. As members of Jesus' kingdom we cannot and must not isolate ourselves from speaking into, engaging with and challenging the political power structures of our day. While Christ's kingdom is not *from* this world it intersects with this world. So must we. We need politicians who follow Jesus as king. We are to be active citizens who follow Jesus as king.

Fifth, this festival helps me pause to ask myself where my **ultimate loyalty and security lie**. The very title "king" in NT is the same word used for "emperor". Caesar was called Lord. Paul declares that Jesus is Lord. Christ as King reminds me that no earthly kingdom, no political power, no charismatic leader, no corporate entity, no seductive ideology, is to have my final loyalty and trust. They belongs to Christ the King. So, even while I might be profoundly disturbed at Trump's elevation

as President-elect of the US; even as I fear the wars escalating around the globe; even as I feel the gloom of environmental threats hanging over us, I choose trustful surrender to Christ the King.

Christ Our King

On Charles III's recent visit to the Australian parliament, Senator Lydia Thorpe interjected by crying out "You're not our king." Whatever our views of her actions, I want to suggest that we could make a similar declaration to any party, autocrat, political leader, corporate entity, social media influencer, who calls for our ultimate allegiance. Rather we can with joy and humility cry out "Christ is our King".

Transition to the Lord's Supper

Have you ever been invited to dine with royalty? Have you ever been asked to set at the same table as a King? I have not ... or have I? For today, you and I are invited to sit at the Lord's table, the table of Christ the King, who loved us and gave his life to redeem us, who has made us a kingdom of priests. As in a few minutes we celebrate the Lord's Supper together, remember that it is the table of Christ the King. Come let us adore and worship and trust Him once again.

To Him be all glory, now and evermore.