

**SERMON OS 34c SUNDAY BETWEEN 20 AND 26 NOVEMBER:
CHRIST THE KING:
GEOFF CHADWICK: DIOCESE OF BUNBURY:
LK 23:33-34
“KINGS”**

Luke 23.33-43

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

Today we celebrate Christ the King, so I thought I would investigate what kings were like in Jesus' time and in the time of the early church. I'm not a historian, but I think this "potted" account may help paint a picture of the Monarchs of the time.

Herod the Great:

was king of Judea from 72BC to 4AD. He is famous for his building projects, especially the rebuilding of the Temple. Nevertheless, he was a tyrant. This is the Herod who enquired of the Maggi and the orchestrated the slaughter of the innocents.

Herod Antipas:

was King and Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from 4BC to 39AD. Effectively he was a vassal of Rome. He's the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded.

In the end he quarrelled with Emperor Caligula and was exiled.

At the time of Jesus' birth, **Augustus** was Ceaser. He reigned over a long period of relative peace (*Pax Romana*) and stability from 27BC to AD14.

At the time of Jesus' crucifixion **Tiberius** was Emperor, following on from Augustus. Initially successful on the "coat tails" of his predecessor, he later became unpopular.

Pontius Pilate: whilst not emperor, was the Emperor's Prefect in Judea from 26-37AD. He is known for his cruelty and is especially famous for presiding over Jesus's crucifixion.

Herod Archalaus: ruled over Judea, Samaria and Idumea after his father Herod the Great died in 4BC. After two years he was deposed by the Romans in 6AD.

At the time of Paul, **Claudius** was Emperor from AD 41-54. It was a time of expansion, but curiously many Senators died whilst he was in power. Meanwhile he was murdered by his wife.

Nero took over from Claudius and reigned from AD54-68. Famously mentally unstable he was eventually murdered by his controlling Mother. His reign is marked by cruelty, tyranny and self-indulgence. Don't forget the legend that he set fire to Rome and blamed it on the Christians.

Pick a king- any king- which one would you like!

So in today's reading, where Jesus, is titled "*This is the King of the Jews*" you would be forgiven to wonder what sort of king was being talked about!

Clearly the early church understood Jesus to be a king unlike the kings of the world. Jesus was not a Herod or a Tiberius or even an Augustus.

This king, king Jesus was something never known in the living memory of the kings of the early church.

What's most striking is that this king, is the crucified one.

If we read a little of John's account of the story we will encounter the ironic mocking of Jesus as king:

1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

2 And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe.

3 They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face.

4 Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him."

5 So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" (Jn 19: 1-5, NRSV)

Jesus, who looks anything like a king, is dressed as a king and saluted. This is ironic writing at its best.

This non-king, really is a king! But not just any king-the king.

The first hearers of this Gospel story would have been shocked by the message. After years of tyrannical oppression, which was the *modus operandi* of royalty, something new is happening.

This is a king who is humble but not humiliated.

Here is a king that opposes evil head on.

Here is a king suffering under the hands of a corrupt judicial system.

Here is a king offering forgiveness, even to bandits.

This non-king is king!

I wonder if you've realised that the early Christians were traitors to the empire. Faced with the pressure to proclaim "Ceasar is Lord " (as written on the currency), they, instead proclaimed "Jesus is Lord".

This is high treason, and many of them lost their lives because of it.

And so, this morning we are all committing treason!

By proclaiming "Jesus is Lord", or "Christ is king", we are swearing allegiance to a realm not of this earth. Our ultimate allegiance is with the "King of Kings"

I'm reminded of what happened at the time of Samul (11th Century BCE), when the people of old demanded that the Jewish nation become like other nations and have a king.

Samuel warns them

11 He said, "...These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots;

12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.

13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.

14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers." (1 Sam 8:11-14, NRSV)

We however, have a different King:

One whose crown weighs heavily with the scars of human folly.

One whose hands ache in the gesture of forgiveness.

One whose nailed feet know the how fear may disable us.

One whose wound of blood and water speaks of wounded humanity.

And one whose title “*This is the King of the Jews*” proclaims a truth hidden in mockery.

Christ the King, the festival, reminds us that our king is not like those of this world. Our king is the incarnate, crucified, resurrected and ascended one. Our king is the servant king, and if servant, then we too must be.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.