

Jesus as Lord is the way to freedom

Reverend Rebecca Newland
Sunday 23rd November 2003, Christ the King

2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-12; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

[With this sermon, Rebecca ended her time at St Philip's where she and David had been a parishioners while Rebecca studied theology at St Mark's and prepared for ordination.]

Well this is a sad occasion for me. The Wallabies lost. I'm speechless really. Sore throat too because David, Hannah and I shouted ourselves hoarse down at the club last night. And it's the last day I will stand up here and preach—unless of course I come back for some reason. But today it is an ending. And that's difficult. David and I have really, really enjoyed being part of St. Philip's. It has been a happy, blessed time. You are a great bunch of people with so many wonderful things to offer others. We have been very blessed by your community.

There are endings happening all over the place for me at the moment as I move into this next stage of my life. Ending of employment at Gininderra gardens, ending of study at St. Mark's, ending of CPE. End of the Rugby World Cup. And today it is the last Sunday of the Church year. Year B is almost finished—we have a three year cycle of readings as you know—and we are about to launch into year C and Advent; so if you want to get ahead of the gospel stories coming up, read Luke's Gospel this week.

The gospel story today brings us right up to an ending as well. Jesus confronts the power of Rome in the person of Pilate and he is about to be crucified. It is the end of Jesus human existence and the paradox is today, in the midst of endings, we celebrate the eternal Reign of Christ the King but after hearing and reading the gospel I am left perplexed. We have a King, bound, abused and waiting to be crucified.

Kings of one sort or another have been part of our world for thousands of years. They are the rulers and people with immense power and influence. I was reading about the country Equatorial Guinea. It is 95% Christian and it has a President, Teodora Nguema. The state radio there recently declared Nguema "the country's God" who was "in permanent contact with the Almighty". It will probably be no surprise to hear that Nguema has a notorious human rights record. Having enormous power, being Kingly, is no guarantee of having compassion and justice. In fact as Lord Acton famously put it "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely".

Here in Australia we may not have Kings or leaders with delusions of divinity but we do have people who are practically demi-Gods. They wield enormous power and influence. Sporting heroes are something else. My favorite right now is George Greegan. —Go the wallabies! And in England they are probably about to depose the Windsors and enthrone Johnny Wilkinson as the new King. And if it's not sport stars, its talk back radio commentators who seem to be able to control whole electorates. And what about the "Australian Idol" phenomenon? I even got sucked into tuning in to seeing who would win.

There are a lot of Kings in the bible as you know. In the reading from 2 Samuel we heard from King David again. Now here was a ruler who was cunning, political, a great warrior and leader but very human and flawed. This is the guy that sends one of his best commanders to the front to be killed so he can sleep with the commanders' wife. Corrupt indeed. However, somewhere in David's flawed makeup he recognizes the sovereignty of God, whose praises he sings in today's reading. At the end of his life, when he has achieved much and suffered greatly, he has finally learnt the difference between a just ruler and a corrupt one.

And in today's Gospel we hear of another King: Jesus—bound, abused and waiting to be crucified.

But Jesus is not just another King. He is not a king but the king of all time and all places. As Revelation tells us he is the alpha and the omega—the beginning and the end. In him, in love, all things hold together, are connected and bound. This is not earthly, human, corrupt, kingship. The story of Jesus is not just the story of a good man 2000 years ago whose teachings inspire and change us. Jesus story is the pivotal point in history, where sovereignty is re-defined.

How does this happen? How can we put our trust in another King? How can we praise, adore, follow and give our wholehearted allegiance to another ruler? In our modern society where individual freedom without responsibility is the new god how can we bow down to a person who stood before Pilate—bound, abused and waiting to be crucified?

Because Jesus is completely radical. He shows us a completely new way of being. His Kingdom is truly not of this world, with its corruption and endings.

Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of Truth. He is someone with total and complete integrity.

He preached that all people were welcomed at God's banquet and then dined with everyone and anyone including prostitutes, thieves and tax collectors, all who were shunned and scapegoated by society.

He taught that service was the way to share in his life and he took a towel and basin and washed his disciples' feet.

He gave people complete freedom to accept or deny his teaching. He never used his power coercively or for personal gain and in a time of great personal need he healed the damaged ear of one of the soldiers sent to arrest him.

He taught his followers to forgive and love their enemies and on the cross he stretched out his arms in surrender and love and prayed that God would forgive his accusers and executors.

He taught that new beginnings were always possible—the wayward child could always come home, that the past could be healed and after the resurrection he forgives and loves afresh the disciples who had denied him and abandoned him to a horrific death.

Jesus ushers in the Kingdom—with integrity, truth, service, sacrifice and love.

No wonder his followers went on to turn the ancient world upside down. Their experience of emperors and rulers had been retribution and oppression. No wonder they declared him the King. They, like us, were thirsty for the way to new life, New Hope, peace and justice. No wonder they declared that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow.

He stands before us—bound, abused, waiting to be crucified.

What is our response to be?

Each of us must make our own response. Each must choose.

But I would like to share something of my response. I actually believe passionately in freedom. Not the sort of freedom George W. Bush keeps going on about which seems to be just an excuse to impose ones definition of freedom onto another or is used to demonize the other.

I believe in the sort of freedom that respects and honours other people and their choices in life. The type of freedom that liberates me from the tyranny of addiction, compulsiveness and my own self-centredness. From my own narcissistic need to have the world how I think it

should be. I have made some terrible mistakes from selfishness and self-centredness, from being trapped in my wants and I strive and struggle towards freedom with responsibility to others. But what I have discovered through countless attempts to live a good and just life is that I need a power greater than myself.

Jesus stands before me. With the knowledge of his integrity and love I bow down, I choose to follow the way of Christ. His example compels, beckons, calls to me. He is a King I can freely give my all to. He inspires and moves me beyond myself into freedom. Into reconciliation and possibility. Into newness, hope and joy. I want Jesus to be Lord of my heart always.

We all know of course that following in the footsteps of Christ is not easy, but he never said it would be. Having Jesus as Lord of our lives, our hearts and minds does not mean we get it comfortable and we know we need prayer, the Holy Spirit and the support of community. We know the need for communion to remind us of Gods love and to connect us to Christ and each other. But we do know that in our struggle towards the truth, in our quest to conform our hearts and minds ever more closely to Jesus Christ that he is with us and in us holding all things together.

Let us pray

Jesus our Lord, Be with us,

help us to choose the path of love and forgiveness, help us to bring your justice and kingdom to this world.

Be the ruler of our hearts

The King of our minds

And teach us understanding and wisdom.

Amen