

Christ the King 2021

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14. Psalm 93. John 18:33-37.

The Coup d'état remains a part of the political landscape of our world, in recent times in Sudan, Myanmar and Mali. Gaining power by force has been a feature of political history since time immemorial. Unlike a revolution a Coup is the sudden, violent overthrow of an existing government by a small group. There is no doubt that the Roman authorities saw the followers of Jesus as no threat and clearly Jesus neither advocated rebellion nor did he lay down a political manifesto for the Kingdom that he was bringing about. It is clearly not a place as we might understand it, a place with borders. At crucial times in the gospels Jesus says that the Kingdom is very near, or the Kingdom is within you. Leo Tolstoy wrote a book called 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', which influenced Mahatma Gandhi, but Tolstoy's thinking has a whiff of the anarchist about it and Jesus certainly did not advocate anarchy. Jesus at his trial before Pilate does state that his kingdom is not one that can be brought about by force, it is not a kingdom that can be likened to anything in this world. God does not mount a Coup d'état.

I know well that speaking about monarchy in Canberra generates some interesting conversations; there are some passionately held views! So I approach this festival with some care! Christ the King tends to conjure up images in our minds, and perhaps for some those images are not helpful. The iconography of Christus Rex often shows an enthroned Christ, looking much like a worldly monarch; hence I have been careful to choose a Christ enthroned on a cross for our pew Sheet today.

Our first reading this morning from Daniel and our Psalm tends to further reinforce these iconic visions of Kingship that so readily come to mind. The Monarch seated upon the throne in regal splendour exercising judgement, bestowing honour on those favoured and proclaiming wise decrees. Certainly that most notorious of monarchs Henry VIII saw himself in this vein. In the front of the King's Bible published during his reign he is depicted as the new King Solomon. We can still find these allusions to the Israelite Monarchy in the ritual of Coronation.

Most of us have never experienced a Coronation. The Queen has been head of the Commonwealth now for so long that most of us were not born when she ascended to the throne. Next year plans are afoot for her Platinum Jubilee celebrations, an event without precedent in British history. Naturally at this stage in the Queen's life there is speculation about the way that her heirs will want to celebrate their own coronation. But when we look back to her Coronation in 1952 we find a service with its roots in Biblical symbolism. The Monarch is anointed and is vested in a Colobium Sindonis which means 'muslin undergarment' – similar to an alb

and a Dalmatic the vestment of the Deacon, a word taken from Diakonia which means servant. There are unspoken parallels between the Coronation service and the rite of Ordination which led many to call it the eighth sacrament.

But we need to be very careful. History should warn us of the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. We must be mindful of the dangers of an absolute ruler; they are alive and well in our world today. Pilate in all four gospels asks Jesus the same question 'Are you the King of the Jews?' In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus responds in the same way: 'You say so.' In John's gospel we read of the interrogation of Jesus, the focus of which is explicitly authority. Pilate is a minor functionary of an absolute ruler, the Emperor is both God and King, Pilate cannot conceive of a king beyond political or ethnic terms. If you are a king whose king are you?

For Pilate, Jesus is a parody of royal authority, Jesus is the one subject to judgement, his kingdom has no army to defend it. He is led away and to complete the parody the soldiers crown him with thorns and dress him in purple, the regal colour. This feast day then serves to remind us that the rule of Jesus is unlike that of any earthly ruler. Jesus says today 'my kingdom is not from this world.' In other words what we are concerned with is not where the kingdom is, but its divine source.

What of us, we how are subject to the reign of Christ, we who express our allegiance to him in the creed. We must remember to express belief in the post enlightenment world is different to that which the writers of the creed understood, 'I give my allegiance to' is perhaps a better way of expressing Credo. We belong to Christ and therefore we are people who belong to the truth. This is of the essence of the Kingdom, the kingdom that Pilate could not conceive.

Much has been written on this; 'What is truth' is often said to be the most oft debated question in the New Testament. Truth is freedom, so Jesus teaches us. We can see in this context that we are only really free when we have confidence in our home; it is not a place that we have to cordon off by our status, ethnicity, power, wealth etc; we are at home when secure in God's love; 'abide in my love.' If this enough for us, we are beginning to glimpse something of this freedom, something of the kingdom; it is not something to be fought over.

So Jesus did not overthrow the ruling order – there was no Coup d'état; his followers did not fight to keep him from being handed over, this is not the way of the Kingship of Christ. Our faith is a sacramental one, it is where we find truth. It is where we glimpse the kingdom in our lives in a multitude of ways, even in the monarchy that rules us whether Queen or President. We pray that they might be inspired by the Spirit of Christ the King as the embodiment of God's kingdom. Amen.