



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Is your King BIG enough?

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Colossians 1:11-20 ; Luke 23:33-43

Thursday 28/11/19

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At age 19, Elvis Presley's career commenced. His first record was recorded when he was 21. We all know of the adulation poured upon him. He was hailed as "The King", yet by the 70's he was seriously abusing prescription drugs. "In the first eight months of 1977 alone, [his doctor had prescribed for him] more than 10,000 doses of sedatives, amphetamines and narcotics." He died that year aged 42.

Michael started in show business at a young age. By age 13, he had started his solo career. Rising to the heights of stardom, Jackson named "The King of Pop." Yet all was not well. Various cracks in the character and the façade became evident. He died of cardiac arrest after the sustained abuse of sedative and anti-anxiety drugs.

Those sorry tales are not unique. People cannot sustain the impact of fan-worship and extreme wealth as we have seen in the lives of many rock stars. He who exalts himself will be brought low.

Last Sunday was the last Sunday before Advent. It is the end of the Church liturgical year and is called Christ the king Sunday. At the end of the cycle of readings for each year we focus on Christ as the glorious king.

Jeremiah prophesied in the last days before the fall of the Southern Kingdom. He refers to the rulers as the shepherds of the people. They lacked wisdom, they lacked integrity; justice failed; the people suffered.

But in the midst of this, Jeremiah pointed to the coming one: a righteous ruler, a King from the line of David – in fact the Messiah. This King will reign wisely; he will do what is just and right. In his days Judah will be saved spiritually and Israel will dwell safely.

He will be called "the LORD, our Righteousness." *LORD* is in capital letters. That is the way our Bibles show that it represents the personal name for God, *Yahweh*.

This is not any ordinary descendent of David, it is *Yahweh*, God himself who is our righteousness. You wouldn't declare God to be your righteousness if he were righteous and you were not and nothing changed. Then you would say, "God our Judge." No, this is the one who has actually given righteousness to us.

In the gospel reading, Jesus is acknowledged King by two people even as he is rejected and killed.

Pilate asked if he were the King of Jews and declared him not deserving punishment. Yet he finally gave in to pressure and imposed the death sentence. The notice on the cross was the official reason for the sentence: "The King of the Jews".

And there was another who understood that Jesus was King: the second criminal.

He showed an understanding of a judgement to come - that life continues beyond death and there we must account for our lives. He acknowledged his guilt and he declared the righteousness of Jesus.

Then this man asks Jesus to remember him when he comes in his Kingdom. He shows enormous faith. He is dying; Jesus is dying. They know that they will be dead by sundown and even under those conditions he asks Jesus to remember him when he comes in his kingdom.

In those extreme circumstances he is confident that his dying neighbour will live again. In that most unpromising of situations, he believes the tortured Jesus will return as a King. As a convicted criminal he understands the offer of forgiveness and cries out for mercy. This thief is a hero of the faith!

And Jesus responds, "I tell you the truth: today you will be with me in paradise."¹

The dying criminal was not wrong. He had understood correctly. He had placed his faith in the right person. He received salvation. Though he would die, he would not perish but be conscious with Jesus in a lovely place. There is the assurance of continuing existence. Do you have that assurance? Have you like the criminal, called out to Jesus and told him you trust that he is able to save you. Have you asked him to free you from the penalty of your sins? Have you asked him to be your king?

We need to do that individually. It is not an automatic transaction. We have to ask. The other criminal, the mocker, did not receive any assurance. It is like approaching North Shore Hospital car park. The barrier is down and you come up to the ticket machine. You put your arm out and push the big button and the ticket comes rattling out of the slot. No-one is forcing you to take the ticket. But if you want to get into the carpark, you must take the ticket. Listening to me talk about Jesus our righteousness is like pushing the button. But you have to take action – grab the ticket and the barrier will go up and you can drive straight through. To become righteous, you must believe that Jesus can deal with your sin and ask him to.

As we turn to the letter to the Colossians, Paul gives us the view behind the scenes. We are shown who this Jesus is who died in such circumstances and ... the outcome.

Who is Jesus? He is the creator. We often think of the Father as the creator but the Bible clearly states the Trinity, as a whole, acted to create the universe. Here we have the emphasis on the Son creating. If you are unsure about whether he is really God, it is there in our reading: "All the fullness of God dwells in him."

Everything that has been created was created by him: heavenly, earthly, visible, and invisible. As creator he existed before everything else and it is he who holds everything together.

What was he doing there? Through the Son, Jesus, God the trinity reconciles all things to himself. "All things" means that if things are to be reconciled to God it has to be through the Son. There is no other reconciler.

Not only is Christ supreme in the original creation but he is the beginning of the new creation. He is the firstborn from the dead – the first to have a resurrection body. He is the head of the Church. And so both in this first creation and in the new creation Christ is supreme in every way.

Our King is the creator. Our King is glorious. Our King has all supremacy over every other being, over every other name in creation.

Is your understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ big enough? Do you need to ask him to save you? Do you need to ask him to forgive you? Maybe you would like to pray with the man next to him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

¹ Luke 23:43 (NIV)