

St Brandon's 20.11.22

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Luke 23: 33-43

Christ the King

Did you see the photo of the King released last Monday, his birthday, to mark the new job he has taken on?

No, not the one where he wears a crown and sits on a throne, the other one?

King Charles is now The Ranger of Windsor Great Park and was pictured holding a staff and leaning on an ancient oak tree, deep in thought. He now has care of the huge park and all the creatures in it, from the herds of deer to the millions of human visitors.

It's a stunning photo, which conveys
continuity, contemplation and care.

It also came to mind as I read today's Old Testament passage.

The prophet Jeremiah, having pronounced God's judgement on the evil shepherds who have not cared for the people of God, foretells a time when *the Lord will raise up a righteous branch for David* – a new limb of David's family tree and royal line – who will deal wisely, execute justice and righteousness in the land and save the people.

We pray for King Charles, that he will be given grace and strength to be a wise and just King who lives up to the image of the Ranger, perhaps the closest we can get in our day to the Shepherd King whom Jeremiah foretells.

We also know that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ, the promised King who spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. And in a few weeks we will tell again the story of his birth in royal David's City.

So far, so good, on this last Sunday before Advent when we focus on **Christ the King.**

But surely we read the wrong gospel passage?

Surely it should have been Christ's resurrection or Ascension, or his second coming in glory, that was read today. Surely, a reading which proves that Jesus is demonstrably King, reigning in glory?

Surely not this, the end of the road,
the horror and grimness of Golgotha?
Surely not the humiliation, scoffing, jeering and taunts?
Why this?

Because, on this Christ the King Sunday,
we are asked to recognise Jesus first as our Saviour,
the only one who can accomplish the salvation, rescue and redemption of the
world, and of every person in it.

That's what we see here, at The Place of the Skull –
the place where all human striving, progress and intellect are laid bare to
reveal our absolute inability to save ourselves.

We see Jesus the Saviour, whose words in the midst of excruciating pain are a
prayer of forgiveness,
for that is what his executioners and mockers need,
that is what we all need.
We need forgiveness.
We need Jesus to save us. We cannot do it ourselves.

Unless Jesus is Saviour first, he will never be our King.
And the second thief knows this.
He knows he is guilty, he knows he deserves death.
He glimpses, even *in extremis*, he glimpses who Jesus is – glimpses God in
human form, expressing forgiveness and love, glimpses the King.

And he asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom.
Jesus promises him forgiveness and eternal life,
with him in Paradise, today.

Of all the responses to Jesus which Luke records in this passage,
it is the dying thief alone who asks Jesus to save him
and acknowledges him as King.
And it is the dying thief alone who receives the promise of forgiveness and
eternal life which the Saviour's death makes possible.

Jesus the Saviour and Jesus the King are one, for unless we are saved by and
through and in him, we will never know him as King.

We must not pay lip service to Christ the King,
but rather come as we are, unable to save ourselves, asking for forgiveness.
We come to Christ the King though Christ our Saviour.

And we remember that Shepherd King prophesied by Jeremiah is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. That's what his Kingship meant and means, that is why he came.

This King Jesus holds not a sceptre but a shepherd's staff,
and leans not on a throne or even an old oak tree, but on the rugged cross , on which he lays down his life for his sheep.
He is the Saviour Christ, the Saviour King.

Here at St Brandon's we have the privilege of worshipping Sunday by Sunday in a space which reminds us of this.

At this table, we recall Jesus' passion and receive the symbols of his crucified body and blood.

We remember that we are saved and forgiven
not because of anything we do or can ever do,
but through his death for us.

As we do so, we can look up at our beautiful east window and receive afresh the promise of Paradise with him,
and worship our Saviour King.

As I close, I've asked Richard to play the Taize song which repeats the words of the dying thief, and which we always sing here on Good Friday.

I'd like us to look at the Paradise window,

And please join in with the song and make them your prayer.

It's no. 276 if you need the words, but please don't bury your head in your hymn book – look up and receive God's promise to you today.

We'll remain seated to sing and I'm going to take a seat too.