

**REFLECTIONS FOR THE FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING ~ THE REIGN OF CHRIST**  
**The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale**  
**20 November 2022**

Today we celebrate the Reign of Christ or the Feast of Christ the King, a relatively new feast in the Church's calendar, given to us by Pope Pius XI in 1925 and moved to the last Sunday of the liturgical year in 1970. The earliest this feast can occur is November 20 (as it does this year). It was created in response to the growth of secularism and to the dissension between Italy and the Vatican about the political control of Rome and the Vatican. Today, we continue to celebrate this feast but now with a new understanding and awareness. Indeed, the initial reason for the establishment of the feast, our understanding of Jesus as King, and the readings in the Liturgy of the Word are all cloaked in paradox.

A paradox is a statement or idea that seems to contradict itself, runs counter to our expectations. It is a combination of the ancient Greek words, *para* ("beyond) and *dokein* ("to think"). Combined, *paradoxos* or paradox, means "beyond thinking." A literary paradox is an idea that forces us to think beyond the normal, the expected. While it appears to contradict itself, upon further exploration, it reveals a deeper meaning. Let us explore some of the paradoxes inherent in today's feast and scripture readings.

Our usual image of a king is that of a man of power, wealth, and political control, attained not by the choice of the people but either from inheritance or by warfare. In ancient times, once the king was crowned he became the favoured of the gods and, in some cultures, actually became a god. The first reading today introduces us to King David, certainly the most powerful and important king of the Israelites. Yet the reading from 2 Samuel undermines most of this imagery.



The people declare that David is one of them, "we are your bone and flesh" (2 Sam 5:1) – there is nothing extraordinary about him. God says, "It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel" (2 Sam 5:2). Remember that the shepherd was the lowliest worker in the society – poor, did not own the flock he tended, worked day and night in an environment of all kinds of weather at high risk from thieves and wild animals, dressed poorly, and smelled like the sheep and goats he tended. This is a paradoxical image for certain – a king whose job description is a shepherd. And the third paradox of this reading is that the king is

chosen by the people in a covenantal relationship and is anointed by the elders to the position.

Psalms 122 is one of the "Psalms of Ascent" – psalms recited by the people as they go to Jerusalem and to the Temple ("the house of the Lord") for the three pilgrimage festivals; Passover (*Pesach*), Weeks or Pentecost (*Shavuot*), and Tabernacles or Tents (*Sukkot*) – all festivals linked to the harvest. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a time for giving thanks to God, the one who provides the fruits of the harvest, ensures life for the people. This God is the true king who binds the city and the people together. The next three verses in the psalm which are not sung or read today pray for peace for Jerusalem, "may they who love you prosper" (Ps 122:6). Our God who is king is not about warfare and violence but about peace and good and gladness.

The reading from the letter to the Colossians continues that theme of thanksgiving to the one who gives life to all of us, “Give thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Col 1:12). The Father introduces us to the Son, one who is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15). This takes us to yet another dimension of understanding of what being a king means, “in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). This creating king, this ruler of the cosmos, also brings peace not by warfare but through suffering – “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20).



***Christ between the two Thieves***  
Macha Chmakoff

The greatest paradox lies in the Gospel reading – indeed, a number of paradoxes. Jesus is dying on the cross, being mocked by the leaders of the people, by the soldiers, and by a criminal dying beside him. The leaders of the people say that, because he is “the Messiah of God, his chosen one” (Lk 23:35), he should save himself. The soldiers say that, because he is “the King of the Jews” (Lk 23:37) even written in the inscription over him, he should save himself. The criminal says, “Are you not the Messiah” (Lk 23:39) and, therefore, able to save himself and the other two criminals. The very ones who mock Jesus reinforce the meaning of his name (Jesus in Hebrew means “the Lord saves”) and give him his titles: “Messiah of God,” “God’s chosen one,” “king of the Jews,” “Messiah”).

The one in the scene who does not mock is the second criminal. This criminal acknowledges his guilt for the crime for which he is being punished and then pleads, calling Jesus not by his formal titles but personally and intimately by his own name, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk 23:42). This

criminal has no doubt that Jesus will become the king but not a king who controls – he is a king who “remembers.” And Jesus, the one who chooses not to save himself, saves this man who repents, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). While the second criminal would have been blessed for the remembering to come in the future, Jesus responds immediately, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” Jesus and the criminal have begun this journey in suffering, will continue it in death, and will enter new life together. The kingdom has become the kin-dom!

Jesus’ promise of “today” echoes other times when the writer of Luke’s Gospel announces a new moment in understanding. In Luke 2:11, the angels announce to the shepherds, “to you is born today in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord”. In Luke 4:21, Jesus begins his public ministry with his teaching in the synagogue, “He began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” In Luke 19:9, Jesus tells the gathered crowds that Zacchaeus has begun a new life, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.”

The pastor, Karoline Lewis, adds, “In Jesus, we have a king who is crucified. Second, we have a king who forgives the very people who have secured his death. Third, we have a king who, while

**Jesus and the Good Thief**  
Lynne Kiefer Kobvleck



hanging on his cross, grants salvation to the criminal on the cross next to him (unique to Luke's passion narrative). And fourth, we have a king who brings the condemned into Paradise with him rather than bring upon them further condemnation. One of the primary characteristics of our king is a commitment to solidarity with and in our suffering." From our growing understanding of "deep incarnation," we know that this "king" continues to be in solidarity with and suffers with all created beings, human and other-than-human.

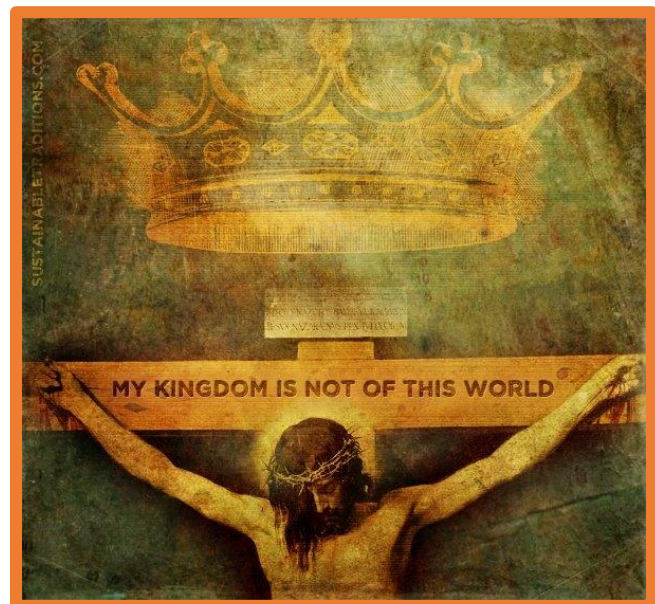
Veronia Lawson rsm adds, "The title of today's feast reminds us of the boundless nature of God's rule or reign: we celebrate Christ Jesus as ruler of the universe, of all that is and of all that will be. As our understanding of the universe expands, we find ourselves caught up in the ever creative and saving presence of a compassionate, merciful God who has been revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth."

The image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the one in whom all things in heaven and earth were created – the king we celebrate today – is the Jesus dying, being mocked, cursed, and laughed at, the one who gives hope to one who is being crucified with him. To add to the paradox, next Sunday, the first Sunday of Advent, we will begin our movement to Christmas when this king comes as a little child, born to a young teenager far from home, born into a refugee family, facing homelessness to avoid another king's wrath.

We conclude our contemplation of this paradox with today's paradoxes echoed in a poem-prayer from Thom Shuman:

Gathering God:  
when we have only a few pennies of hope  
in our pockets,  
you multiply us into a blessing.  
When the world whispers seductively to us,  
you tell us of your joy for us.  
When everyone has forgotten  
even who we are,  
you shout out our name with delight:  
"My Beloved!"

Dawn from on high:  
when we would divide people by class,  
by race, by age,  
you cast your lot with the outcasts of society.  
When we get lost from the muddled directions  
the world gives us,  
you lead us down that path called Peace.





Spirit of wisdom:

when we grow impatient with all the trivial matters of life, you surround us with serenity.  
When the world puts us on the route to sin,  
you transfer us to the streets of the kin-dom.

God in Community, Holy in One, we trust that you will remember us.

With these words, “we trust that you will remember us,” we bring our old church year to a close and move to begin a new church year filled with hope and promise and possibility. Like the many paradoxes of this feast day, the paradoxes of our own lives will unfold with new meaning in this kin-dom that we share with the sacred communion of all creation.



*Christ the King, Janet Melrose*

In this painting, see the symbols of Christ's overflowing life and love:

- ❖ hands outstretched both to welcome us and send us out again
- ❖ “living water” to refresh and renew us
- ❖ a tree of life whose leaves are for healing
- ❖ an angel to remind us God always has a message for us
- ❖ fish aplenty, like the fish we are to bring in as the first disciples did, like the fish of that resurrection breakfast on the seashore
- ❖ stars – for Bethlehem, and for Christ the Dayspring from on High to shine in our hearts

On this feast of the Reign of Christ, let us ponder anew the question:

**Who do you say that I am?**