

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Christ the King

readings: [Jeremiah 23.1-6](#), [Colossians 1.11-20](#), [Luke 23.33-43](#)

20 November 2022

*“Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them;
Take our minds and think through them;
Take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. Amen.”*

I was walking through Derby Church House the other day and passed a high visibility fire marshal’s jacket. Nothing odd about that, they’re on most of the landings and stairwells throughout Church House in the event of a fire. And knowing I was coming here to preach this Sunday on the occasion of Christ the King, it got me thinking about the deeply theological issue, which i haven’t seen in any Christian books, podcasts, academic journals or theological college courses....the psychological impact on the Christian disciple of donning a high-visibility jacket. Because, friends, the impact, indeed the transformation in character on donning a high visibility jacket is profound. Now for legal reasons i need to point out that the name I’m about to use and the scenario is not based on real events but is an entirely fictional construction of my mind:

Brian is a member of St Faiths Church and is known for being a wise, reflective thinker who over time and owing largely to his gentle unassuming manner has become a valued member of St Faiths congregation. If you were to ask any member of St Faiths about Brian, they would tell you of a mature Christian who was humble in character. But once a year Brian volunteers as a Steward at a national Christian gathering where, as part of his role he is required to wear a high visibility jacket and carry a two-way radio. Brian’s role is to Steward the car-parking, helping delegates at the event appropriately park their cars in one of the conferences fields.

Standing in that field adorned in his high visibility jacket and two-way radio, Brian is no longer gentle, contemplative, humble Brian, but directive, authoritarian Brian who stands for no nonsense in the alignment of cars in his field, nor does he entertain the delegates attempts to democratise the car parking process.

Fortunately, later on in the Stewards lounge, having made a cup of tea and indulged in a rich tea biscuit, having put the two way radio back in the charger and removed the high-visibility jacket Brian returns gentle, humble, reflective soul he’s widely known to be.

The end.

Which parody of Brian’s character is reflective of the culture of our times and which do we see modelled in Christ the King?

In Roman's 12:2 we read:

Do not be conformed to this world , but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2, NRSV

And this morning Friends, I want to us to think about who we are and how our characters define us in our daily lives as being followers of Christ the King and I want to suggest to you that if we are looking for sources of inspiration in how we posture ourselves in the world and all the places where we do life, then we must look at Jesus...at how he was, his character, the way he interacted with those he encountered. And I want us to recognise that is we are truly the eyes, ears, hand, feet and mouth of Jesus, then how we embody Jesus in our lives affects the way people might glimpse Jesus the King through us.

Meekness is not weakness.

Weakness in our society is to be avoided in preference to success and meekness is missing from contemporary language altogether. And yet as explore Luke's telling of the crucifixion on this festival of Christ the King, it is meekness we'll account, not weakness. And far from a game of semantics this morning to embrace meekness following the example of Jesus, is the invitation to be bold as a Christian in challenging the vast array of injustices of our age, but do so with grace and humility.

Meekness is an attribute of human nature and behaviour that has been defined as an amalgam of righteousness, inner humility, and patience.

And meekness features on a few occasions in the bible:

- Numbers 12:3 Moses described as the meekest man in the bible
- Matthew 5:5 - The Beatitude - Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.
- Matthew 11 - Jesus spoke of himself being meek and lowly

Power under God's control means two things: (1) refusal to inflate our own self-estimation; and (2) reticence to assert ourselves *for* ourselves.

We hold today's Gospel passage on the one hand, which tells of Jesus on the cross, crucified and derided as the King of the Jews and on the other the contrasting image of Jesus as a newborn baby, incarnate son of God, yet vulnerable new born child all the same.

As we enter into the season of Advent we begin not just a journey to the birth of Jesus, but in that short season between Christmas and Easter, we tell the story of the life of the child who becomes the cornerstone of peace-stories and founds a community of disciples characterised by its diversity. The fledging community of Jesus will often get it wrong but it will more often be a source of light and hope. This community of people compelled by the Good News to follow Jesus will be a community filled with the Holy Spirit who in the same divine breath inspires the celebration of diversity and reconciliation between those for whom difference has

become a source of fear and tension. And presiding over this community of people is Christ the King.

And as we gaze at the cross of Jesus, brought front and central by today's Gospel reading, we gaze not at the familiar style of victory poses seen as a footballer drives the ball into the back of the net, or the rugby player taking the ball over the try line, but a different kind of victory pose....the victory for justice, for the community of followers of Jesus Christ, who with the Holy Spirit as their divine lifeblood, will continue to be the community that celebrates the diversity of human life made in God's image, as well as reconciling those in conflict.

Meekness is not weakness, through the apparent meekness of the cross, justice, diversity and reconciliation have entered the world. Through the apparent meekness of the Christ-Child, flawed humanity becomes a source of light and life. And in both instance of apparent meekness Christ is King.

We're offered the crucifixion story to remind us as we enter Advent of what human beings prepared to follow Christ the King are to be like. Luke tells us that Jesus rejected the drugged wine that would deaden the pain of the cross. In all the apparent meekness of the cross Jesus, was facing the fullness of death and in the midst of that spoke a forgiving spirit to the criminals crucified with him:

Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom. Jesus replied... Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

That forgiveness that Jesus extended the penitent thief amidst the agony of the cross speaks of something that is truly unique for Christians - and that is forgiveness, rather than people who buy for blood or rejoice in downfall, to be a follower of Christ the King is to model the unmerited but transforming forgiveness that Jesus extended the thief on the cross.

In the book of Acts Stephen whilst being stoned reflected this very act of forgiveness asking God to forgive those who were stoning him. Paul, writing to the Ephesians said:

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32

Or as Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor expressed it:

Today you will meet all kinds of unpleasant people; they will hurt you, and injure you, and insult you; but you cannot live like that: you know better, for you are a man in whom the spirit of God dwells.

Meekness is not weakness - if you are a follower of Christ the King, then the profession of your lips as we shortly join together in the creed, must be revealed in your thoughts, words and actions, that the world might glimpse through you the alternative vision of Christ the King.

Meekness is not weakness

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