

Coronation of Charles III – Luke 22:24-30 & Isa 40:12-17, 25-end

Blimey, would you want to be King? I wonder.

Would your family and loved ones want that for you? At what cost!

In the Bible, Jesus is only called king in the parables – like the king who calls his sheep, the ones who had cared for the thirsty and the stranger and the poor, to inherit his father's kingdom – in Matthew chapter 25, and at the cross. The same gospel describes how they nailed a sign 'this is Jesus, the king of the Jews' – which sought to justify the Romans executing him and reflected the mockery of many people, as our king of Love gave his last breath and died in such pain, and such shame. No, Jesus wasn't the king that many of his people were waiting for, longing for. Yet his dignity, his authority, shone from God and his very self. Not a mere title or golden crown.

'Are you a king?' asks Pilate, of the man standing before him that day in Jerusalem. 'You say I am', replies Jesus, 'my kingdom is not from this world' (this world of military, economic or social power); 'for this I was born...to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' (John 18:37). If only more of our kings and queens had listened more closely to his voice, you might say...

In times of Empire, echoes of which were so elegantly portrayed in the Coronation service at Westminster Abbey, parts of the Bible were judiciously used to justify and adorn the rising economic, military and political power of these British Isles. (We remember, with shame, that Christians quoted Bible verses to defend slavery and the huge wealth generated by the exploitation and suffering of countless human beings).

Nowadays, our readings for today's service focus instead on God's power and majesty, as the source of all that is good. Our Gospel reading, on the other hand, depicts Jesus's disciples in their all-to-human squabbling for status and prominence...but he wasn't the sort of king they expected or were waiting for.

We are also more aware, or certainly should be, that when Israel wanted to have a monarchy – like all the other countries and peoples around them – both Samuel and God were saddened. Yes, Samuel's sons – leading as judges – failed to follow God's ways, but YHWH laments that his people 'have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me from the day I brought them up out of Egypt.' Samuel goes on, following God's instruction, to warn the tribes of Israel that a king will bring with him militarism, forced labour, privilege and injustice in their society, taking the best of things for himself. If you don't believe me, have a look at 1 Samuel, chapter 8, verse 4 onwards. But the people were insistent and, yes, what God warned them would happen did happen.

Yet our new King has shown through the years an awareness not only of his own privilege into which he was born, but also his ability to promote and bring about change for the better; whether supporting myriad charities, young people starting out in business and those left behind from our education system. He has demonstrated, despite the mockery of the media and the newspapers many of us buy, a passionate commitment to averting environmental disaster and seeking a better way in which we can be better stewards of God's good Creation.

For example, over 50 years ago, in his first public speech of many on the subject, the King said: 'we are faced at this moment with the horrifying effects of pollution in all its cancerous forms.'

We trust that his mother taught our new king well; that to lead is to serve, and to understand the needs of all people, of all faiths and backgrounds, and to represent our nation by modelling values of tolerance, compassion, decency and welcome for all those who are suffering or marginalised. The late Queen understood that all real authority and dignity flow from God; the God who Isaiah exclaims

is 'the Lord, the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth', who 'does not faint or grow weary' or give up; but who gives strength to those who call upon him. (Isaiah 40).

We as a nation have a long way to go, but we – along with millions of people across the world this weekend – pray for our new king; that God will bless him as he seeks to 'be a blessing to all God's children, of every faith and conviction' and background. May we, too, find our true dignity in being the beloved of God, especially in times of being judged or mocked by others. May we, too, keep on seeking God's way, and sharing God's love, even when we fail, or our lives are messy and challenging.

For that, is what God's kingdom, is truly about.

Amen.