

## Sermon by Rev Elizabeth Richardson

### Christ the King, 20 November 2016 at Wesley 10.30am service

#### Preaching of the Word

Today is Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the Christian calendar and next Sunday is the first in Advent. We start a new set of lectionary readings in the three year cycle. You may notice that from next Sunday, most of our gospel readings throughout the year will be from Matthew. Because it is the end of the Christian year, today we think about the sum of all we have covered in the past year. What does the life of Jesus mean to us - the one we celebrated as a new born baby last Christmas and followed through his ministry, his crucifixion and resurrection. At the crucifixion, the title "King of the Jews" was put on the cross as an ironic title but it became clear that Jesus really was the leader sent by God. Not a political leader, not a military king, but one to lead the way we live.

So, who or what rules your life? Is it someone in your family? Is it money concerns, the need to pay the mortgage and buy food? Is it time constraints? Is it your boss? Or is the overarching rule in your life the will of Jesus?

Think of the difference it makes if following Jesus is the rule in your life rather than pleasing your boss or making money? Those other things may be important but we all have a number of important leaders in our life. What matters is which is the overriding one. If Jesus is the primary rule for us then we may choose one job instead of another – making sure that we are working in an ethical position. If Jesus is the primary rule for us then we may take a careful stand on issues of social justice or of concern for God's creation.

Now take a look not just at us as individuals but our whole society. What rules our society? Is it the budget? Is it big business driving everything for their own immediate gain? Governments of most countries all too often give in to vested interests – think back to tobacco and then think of other major issues and how big business can control things. Or in our society is it justice for all? Like the 1907 ruling by Justice Higgins on the Harvester case which brought in the basic wage for white men in Australia. Of course that was over a hundred years ago, it took much longer to give fair and equal pay to women and indigenous Australians. But now where are we when too many of our companies can get away with paying slave wages to foreign students and others. So do we speak up when we see injustice? Do we speak up or contribute financially to help protect our wildlife and our environment for the health of all of us?

In September, I took part in a bird watching tour of the south west of WA. We saw dozens of species of birds including the endangered Carnaby's black cockatoo and the very similar, Baudin's black cockatoo. They look the same until your binoculars show a slightly longer beak on the Baudin's, or you hear the different call, or observe the different trees on which the two feed. Quite a few of the birds we saw are endemic to the area because the Nullabor Plain has stopped some from migrating.

As well as birds, we looked at the many flowers in bloom in the bushland – flowers from the showy red banksia to tiny ground orchids, so easy to overlook. That south west corner of our country is one of the world's 34 hot spots for species of plants with many of them endemic. In fact this area is Australia's only world hot spot for plant biodiversity. We are very blessed in this country with so many species of plants and birds and animals. All are part of God's wonderful creation and we need to care for them. As Paul's letter to the Colossians says, in Jesus, all things were made because Jesus was with God from the beginning. And so, says Paul, we need to give thanks to God. And we give thanks to Jesus for his work for creation. That also means that we do what we can to ensure that habitat is not needlessly destroyed. Sadly on that trip we also saw extensive salt pans caused by deforestation.

Kings had been vitally important in the history of Israel since the first king, Saul and his successor, David. Our reading from Jeremiah tells of how there had been bad or poor kings and God would provide a new king who would show wisdom, justice and right government. This new king would be an actual descendant of King David. And finally, Jesus, a descendant of David, was brought by God to become the ruler the people were waiting for. It was in this way that Jesus was able to promise the criminal on the cross next to him that that very day, the criminal would be in paradise with him. Jesus does not save us from danger, pain or illness but he does stay with us and support us in difficult times.

At the start of today's reading, Paul prays that we might become strong and prepared to endure everything with patience while giving thanks. For strength we need the right food. Nourishment is important for all living things. Gardeners know that good nourishment and water makes for a strong plant and that in turn helps the plant to fight off attacks from disease, insects or extreme weather.

A few years ago, at Batemans Bay, I was given a rose for the manse garden and it flowered vigorously. But then in one week we had two extremely hot days of 43 and 46 degrees and the bush was badly burnt. Afterwards it put up enormously tall shoots without flowers – way above my reach. Not suckers – they came from above the graft. It was not until the following spring and after careful attention from me, that it returned to normal and flowered once more. Major crises can affect us all and we can go off the rails. That is when we need the care of others to see us through and to come to accept that Jesus is there for us, ready to assist us and nurture us. Then we can grow back and flourish once more. For us, strength comes from knowing Jesus, and learning from him bit by bit throughout our lives. We could think of it as feeding on the word of Jesus.

The gospels were written to make sure that the stories of Jesus would carry on and continue to give life to people of the early church.

John Dominic Crossan speaks of the importance that was given to the matter

of rule in Greek and Roman society at the time of Jesus and Paul. The countries of the eastern Mediterranean had suffered too much from despotic rulers and so various thinkers had written about the ideal use of power. Despots are never good because their concern is for their own position and wealth and status without thought for the needy in society. What was needed was strong rule that ensured justice for all the members of a society, not just the wealthy or upper classes. Crossan says: "How does human power exercise its rule and how, in contrast, does divine power exercise its rule? The Kingdom of God is people under divine rule – and that, as ideal, transcends and judges all human rule". (Jesus, a revolutionary biography, p55)

Christians thought of Jesus and how his rule was the ideal. If only all people could live according to the lessons Jesus had taught, then the world would be a better place.

How many today reject Jesus as being of no account? And yet, the followers of Jesus have continued through almost two thousand years and the Roman Empire is ancient history. The followers of Jesus set up hospitals when no government did, the followers of Jesus have cared for the homeless, the orphaned, the poor. The followers of Jesus have made a difference to the lives of people in every country and down the ages. And one day, the lessons taught by Jesus, will be followed by all.

Amen.

Rev Elizabeth Richardson