

# Christ the King

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*The sermon given at the Parish Communion Service on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2019 by the Curate, the Revd. Tim Kelly, in Beverley Minster*

*1 Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43*

A case of mistaken identity. "You can't be the Tim Kelly. Surely not. Not Professor Tim Kelly. That's not possible." This was one of the oddest interactions that I had experienced in my former life as a university academic, being halfway around the world, standing opposite someone who I've never met before telling me that despite whatever I may think, I'm not Tim Kelly. How did a situation like this come to pass.

Well as an academic and researcher you write papers and in my 25 years as a university academic, amongst other things that's what I did, writing approaching 200 papers and creating a fair body of work that engineers and scientists worldwide had read, and perhaps most importantly for me, had started to use in their day to day work. A little bit of academic fame. For this engineer in Australia though, she was having great difficulty reconciling the Tim Kelly whose papers she'd read for the last 20 years and the person that was standing before her now. I simply wasn't the person she expected me to be. Surely, professors should be old and I wasn't old enough; and they should have grey beards, and I had no beard at all at the time - maybe if she met me now she might be a little bit more convinced. All the time she had spent reading the words that I've written had allowed her to build her own picture of me that didn't square with the reality of the person.

And we hear something similar in today's Gospel reading.

This Sunday we are celebrating Christ the King, but interestingly in this reading there is only one person who recognises him as such and he is not the person that you would perhaps expect. In contrast, we hear of many who cannot recognise the identity of the king. As the crucifixion took place, the crowds just watched, the leaders scoffed, the soldiers mocked and in irony, the Romans had fixed the inscription over Jesus, "This is the king of the Jews." This of course was intended to shame and disgrace. These words so close to the truth, yet their eyes were so far

from seeing that truth: they simply didn't see Christ the King; they couldn't understand Christ as king.

And the problem was that Jesus had radically rewritten the script of what it means to have royal power, of what it meant to be king and of what God's Kingdom looked like. Jesus's life had been a demonstration of how it was possible to be a servant King and Jesus had taught on the nature of God's kingdom - just think about the Sermon on the Mount. But it's clear that those around him now, the leaders, the soldiers, the gathered crowd, they must have physically looked upon Jesus but they simply didn't see who he was. They may have listened to the words that Jesus spoke but they didn't hear or understand who he was, or the nature of the coming kingdom. Quite simply put, you could say there's a fight going on for Jesus's identity. We even have the soldiers presuming to tell him who he was and what he should do next - false expectation mixed with disbelief: "If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself." In other words they are saying that in their opinion and the opinion of the crowds, this is what a real king would do next.

Now despite the fact that even as the crucifixion is taking place, Old Testament prophecy, such as the casting of lots for the clothes, is being fulfilled. They can't see the Messiah, Chosen One and King, is inextricably linked to this crucifixion: 'You can't be the Messiah. Surely not. Not the King, not our king. That's not possible. And this can't be how the King story ends.'

Jesus's crucifixion did not occur on a fine altar between two candles, but instead, outside the city limits between two criminals on a dismal executioner's hill called the skull. And it is only these criminals being crucified to Jesus his left and right that disagreed about Jesus's identity: like the soldiers and the leaders the first criminal derides Jesus, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." But there's something that the second criminal has begun to see, something that he has begun to recognise in this Jesus. He can start to see Jesus for who he is and to recognise him as King. Amidst the apparent confusion and chaos of the crucifixion, he is perhaps the very first person to see Jesus clearly. Remember that even days later, confused disciples on the Emmaus Road were saying things like, ""We had hoped that he was going to be the one to redeem Israel. They're still struggling to understand. But this man recognises the King nailed to the cross next to him and he

is humble before him and simply says to him by name, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." At this point, this one guilty criminal perhaps shows that he has more faith than any of the other disciples. Jesus responds and graciously gives the criminal far more than he might ever have thought he deserves, a place with him in paradise.

Some people say that this discourse in the Bible ought to be written in gold letters. Such comfort has it been for many, such comfort does it provide for us: that Jesus promises redemption and renewal, the promised paradise, for all those that recognise their position before him as Lord. In the words of the great hymn 'Thine be the glory, the vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.'

So what is the challenge for us today. Well I'd suggest that in a world of confusing and mistaken identities where 'self' is so readily promoted as king and where other interests so easily take the place of King, the challenge is to recognise Jesus as Christ the King. As the people demanded in John 12:21, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus" and the challenges not only to see Jesus Christ as King but to see how Jesus Christ is King. The whole act of crucifixion was meant to shame; crucifixion was a public performance of humiliation; it was meant to mark failure not triumph; it was intended also as a warning - don't be like this person, 'See what has happened to them. The same fate will face you.'

However, ironically, Jesus uses the cross to show us exactly what kind of king he is and uses it to call us to a life just like his: strength, out of apparent weakness; leadership out of service; and reward out of sacrifice. So as we celebrate Christ the King this Sunday and as we recognise his Kingship in our lives and in this church, may we continue to see Christ more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly. Amen.

## Reading Texts

### Colossians 1:11-20

<sup>11</sup> May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. <sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup> for 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. <sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and 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.

### Luke 23:33-43

<sup>33</sup> When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. <sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." <sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" <sup>41</sup> And he indeed has been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come

into your kingdom." 43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."