

Knox Uniting Church Cluster

Sunday November 23rd, 2025 (RCL: Pentecost +24, Prop 29, Ord 34 - Year C)

“Christ the King Sunday”

Sermon (reflection) by Russell Croxford at Rowville Uniting Church

Bible passages: Jeremiah 23:5-6, Colossians 1:15-20 and Luke 23:33-43

“Two Crowns”

On April 21st, 1970, a wealthy farmer by the name of Leonard Casley, who owned 75 square kilometres of land in Western Australia, formally declared that his property was now a ‘sovereign state’. Casley claimed that he had seceded from Australian control, and had established his own independent country, which became known as the ‘Hutt River Province’. Of course, it wasn’t ever recognised as such but in his own mind Casley was the ruler of his own little kingdom. Casley called himself ‘Prince Leonard’ and granted royal titles to his family members. He created his own currency, stamps and even passports. Again, none of that was recognised, but you have to admire his efforts, even if he was a bit eccentric.

Many people have tried to do the same thing over the years, and this has led to the creation of a term called ‘micronation’. A micronation is a territory of land controlled by a person who claims independence and assumes sovereignty over their own little kingdom.

This got me thinking. Maybe we all do this in one way or another. Maybe we all have our own little kingdoms. Our own ‘micronations’. We all have our own domain: the things we own; the people we have some influence over; the things we manage; the things we feel we have some control over (like our own garden...although that can sometimes feel out of control). All these things make up my own little kingdom and I am ‘King Russ’ in my own micronation.

I wonder what Jesus would say to me about thinking of myself as ‘King Russ’. In the gospels Jesus says quite a lot about ‘human kingdoms’ be they kingdoms we are in charge of or subject to; and he often makes the contrast between human kingdoms and his own kingdom. And he constantly invited people to surrender their own kingdoms, big or small, to him and allow him to rule instead.

So, on this ‘Christ the King’ Sunday we are again faced with the question, ‘How is God’s kingdom different, and what does it mean for each of us to be part of it?’ This question leads us to this idea of ‘two crowns’ – two very different crowns, with a question attached: “Which crown do we put on Jesus’ head?” And the answer to that will depend on what kind of kingdom we think Jesus came to establish.

In our Jeremiah passage, God sends a message to his people through his prophet telling them that there is just too much injustice going on at that time. The nation’s leaders are abusing their people, like Shepherds abusing the sheep in their flock (23:1). So, God promises to send a new King who will “reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land” (v5) It’s a prophecy about the day Jesus will one day come to *be* that king. This new king is called a “righteous Branch” in this passage (v5), meaning a ‘branch’ or descendent of the mighty and respected King David. With prophecies like this, the people understandably came to expect this new King to be like their beloved David – a saviour, powerful and mighty, who would overcome all their enemies.

Now place that expectation of powerful victory against what we see happening in the Luke 23 reading where Jesus hangs on the cross like a disgraced criminal. Where is the power and might in this awful scene?

Crucifixion was the ultimate in humiliation and degradation. In Jesus' case it was also the culmination of all the abuse and ridicule already suffered. The whole process was done deliberately to remove all dignity and honour from a person. It was intentionally a public torture by the Romans to teach people a lesson that, "no one messes with us and if you do, this is what happens". The cross was therefore a statement of power – a power that would crush and silence any insurrection. And Jesus was the victim of this power – *not* the almighty conqueror like King David was.

So, if Jesus really *was* the new king they had all hoped for, he certainly was *not* the kind of king who wore a regal crown. Instead, he wore a 'crown of thorns' (John 19:2) on his head, a symbol of mockery and insult. And the sign they put on the cross, above his head sarcastically stated: "This is the King of the Jews" (v 38) – yet another symbol of mockery. The ultimate picture of powerlessness and humiliation.

And we are told in this story that two criminals were crucified with him, one on each side. One criminal looks at Jesus, so angry that Jesus isn't behaving like the promised Messiah. He hurls insults at Jesus saying "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself, and us!" (v39) He's desperate for an expression of power over their horrific situation. The other criminal also looks at Jesus, maybe seeing the crown of thorns, and despite his own pain he understands the different kind of crown. He sees a true Messiah suffering an underserved death who can truly save people, but in a very different way.

Both criminals are looking at exactly the same picture but seeing it in totally different ways. I'm sure you have seen those pictures – kind of optical illusions, which can be 'seen' in two different ways. The most famous image would have to be that picture which can be an old woman looking down or a young woman looking away – depending on one's perspective. And the experts would tell us that the way we see these sorts of pictures says a lot about our personality! Same picture, two views. Jesus with a crown of gold or a crown of thorns.

The criminal who accepts the real Jesus for who he is, not only experiences forgiveness, but is offered the promise of new life (v 42-43). Therefore, if we are asking, "where is the power in this whole scenario?", the power is in this mercy, grace and forgiveness given by Jesus, suffering himself, offered to someone who least deserves it. There's the real power.

This makes me think about how we see many things in our world and society. Just for fun I did a Google image search for the 'world's ugliest animal' and it came up with a 'blobfish', and yes, it's not a pretty sight. But which way do we look at a blobfish? With distaste? Or with admiration that it is a part of God's wonderful creation? And how do we look at people who are outcast or rejected because of their appearance, actions, background? How do we see them? Jesus invites us to see the strength, beauty, worth – the *power*.

In our Colossians passage we are given yet another picture of Jesus that really shows him to be like a mighty king – powerful over all creation (v16), alive since the beginning of time (v17), supreme (v18), having all the fullness of God within him (v19).

But with all that power and majesty, the writer, Paul adds a final, telling statement which is vital to understanding the *kind* of king he was: “[He made] peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (v20). This ‘king of everything’ comes into the grit and grime, the pain and heartache of our human life, to connect with us on the lowest level.

When we observe monarchs, presidents and prime ministers – I guess we normally see the exercise of power and control. Seldom do we see humble, servant leadership, sadly. But Jesus came to be a ‘servant king’ – a king with a crown of thorns.

Going back to that prophecy in Jeremiah, yes, it is indeed true that the promised new King, in the line of King David came – born that day in a manger in Bethlehem, to restore justice and peace to his people. He came to do that, and he keeps doing it, not with force, but with something far more powerful...with love.