

Sunday Thought

20th November 2022 Sunday before Advent Christ the King Sunday

Readings

Jeremiah 23: 1 - 6

Psalm 46

Colossians 1: 11 - 20

Luke 23: 33 - 43

Royal Triptych



In many churches this *Sunday before Advent* is also known as *Christ the King Sunday*. Today's scriptures are all centred on that theme and my *Thought* uses the readings as a triptych of the kingship of Jesus. Triptychs, like this one from Bethany Lutheran College, Minnesota, are often found as church alterpieces and used to illustrate Bible themes or stories. Mine today is in word pictures, to illustrate aspects of Jesus as King of kings.

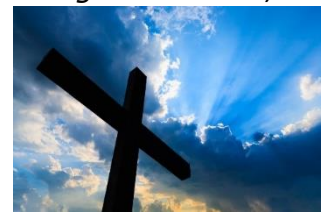
My first panel begins with the Advent theme, promising the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour. Prophet Jeremiah gives an assurance from God to pass on to all his people. *There is a wonderful new day coming which will usher in a time of peace, ending international conflicts, natural disasters, inequalities and domination of the poor by rich, unjust, uncaring leaders. A Messiah will come. He will be a real leader after the pattern of their greatest known ruler, King David. He will be 'The Lord's Salvation' instituting a reign of peace and plenty without fear of injustice or cruel punishment. There will be prosperity for all, including the very poorest.*

Today, the whole world from Ukraine and Afghanistan to Pakistan and Myanmar lives with a hope of welcoming such a promise. Our country too where acute minds search for just, caring governments with workable plans for health and social care, peace and plenty. Basically, as we have noted in recent *Thoughts*, there is universal yearning for lands and communities where God's Kingdom is loved and lived. Next week we shall begin the season of Advent hope. We shall sing *Kingdom of Christ for your coming we pray* and those prayers will be for Jesus to be known as King in His world!

My triptych panel for our Gospel reading tells of what the world did with the King when he came to fulfill the prophet's hope. It's a picture called '*Midnight at noon on Skull Hill*' in which Jesus, the cruelly beaten king is 'nailed' to a cross. Unrecognised as the promised Lord and Saviour Christ, he is dying among other condemned criminals, watched by his few remaining, helpless companions.

Even his meagre possessions are greedily gambled for by his executioners. Religious leaders jeer at him, convinced that the real Messiah could never be condemned as a criminal. The military mock him with his given title, 'King of the Jews'. His companion victims insult him; 'If you're the real Saviour King what about beginning here by saving yourself and us?' Few, amid the shouting and the silences, heard the divine, sure words of hope spoken on the darkened hill that day – his words, spoken to criminals and retained murderers – and indeed to the whole world – 'Father forgive! They don't know what they are doing!' And the word to one penitent who amazingly, even if with blind faith, accepts that he is witnessing a glimpse into the eternally suffering heart of God – 'Today we'll be together in Paradise!.'

My third triptych panel sees that man's glimmer of faith-light become a sure, radiant glow – Jesus in Glory! Paul describes the Lord to Christians in Colossae. It's one of my favourite passages of scripture. Just listen to some of those words! 'His glorious cosmos-wide power gives us life in the Kingdom of God, freedom from the powers of darkness, gives us saving-forgiveness. Jesus is the Son of God. He was one with the Father before the beginning of everything. He is co-creator of all universes. He is superior to all created things! As a man he has been raised from death to become the world's peace-maker. He is the Lord and life of the living church...' and so much more. With new faith I read of him stilling storms, defying devils, healing sick people, raising the dead... I see his Church gathered together from many nations.. and I talk to him intimately when I pray!



If I could paint this *Royal Triptych* you would probably find me constantly visiting the gallery where it is displayed ... on my knees, wide-eyed with wonder. Christ the King has come, and is Coming again in Glory – Our eternal Hope.

A prayer [with Psalm 46 in mind]

My King has a castle of hope,
set among quiet meadows
surrounded by light-spattered woods,
shadowed by rugged crags,
from where life-giving waters flow.

It is a place of sacred refuge, my retreat
when peace is shattered by distressing turmoil,
when pain becomes a grip too tight to break.



Inside the castle walls, his wisdom helps me sort my life, renews my trust,
comforts my spirit and heals in proportion to my need.

The castle door is set low, down behind a broken wooden cross.
It opens to a sunrise touch or sunset rays.
The King is always there, his angels welcoming.
Inside, at peace, I offer my prayer of thanks to Jesus, our King of all kings.

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