

# The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

## Sermon

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### **Sunday 20 November 2022: Angela Hannafin**

Welcome to today's sofa sermon. We celebrate the feast of Christ the King - the Sunday before Advent begins. Let's listen to the scripture from Luke.

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<sup>33</sup> When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

<sup>35</sup> The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. "He saved others," they said, "let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One." <sup>36</sup> The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. <sup>37</sup> They called out to him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> A sign was fastened above him with these words: "This is the King of the Jews." <sup>39</sup> One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!" <sup>40</sup> But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? <sup>41</sup> We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

<sup>43</sup> And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

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We've heard a lot about royalty this year, and I don't just mean the new season of The Crown. Only a few months ago our beloved Queen died and Prince Charles became King Charles. I don't think I was the only person to find that culture change felt very odd to digest after such a long reign from Elizabeth II. Whilst we have heard that our current Sovereign plans to organise a 'slimmed down' monarchy and streamlined Coronation, no doubt the infrastructure surrounding King Charles III, as with any other royal figure, will still reflect wealth, power, and authority.

So, I think that one of the purposes of Luke's gospel, is to show us the strong contrast between the life and death of an earthly king like, say, King Charles, and life and death of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. Jesus is not like any other king, or Messiah. He wasn't what was expected. Here, at the end of his life, Jesus is crucified with criminals – men who have appeared before a court and been found guilty. There is irony here, as Jesus has not been found guilty of anything. That's what one of the criminals tells the other as they hang on the cross, either

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side of him, and one of them jeers at him. They deserve to die, but Jesus doesn't. Out of those two criminals, one is speaking words of truth and faith, recognising who Jesus really is. The other is like any other person at this scene, mocking him. We read of this wonderful exchange between Jesus and the criminal who defends him (we don't even know of his name, which is a sign that he is lowly). He asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. He knows that Jesus is the King of the Jews and the sign that's fastened there is true. Jesus tells him, 'Today you will be with me in paradise'. This is the whole gospel in one conversation. That we realise none of us are worthy of God's love and goodness, we are all guilty, but we respond to an undeserved invitation to eternal life which God reassures us of. So, this is a very different king, who came not to be served but to serve and does so even as he is dying, uttering words of forgiveness and invitation to those who have faith.

Today we celebrate Christ the King. We remember that Jesus' reign now continues in heaven, as he is seated with the Father at his right hand, the place of honour. As we start Advent next Sunday, we will journey towards Christ arriving on earth as a baby. However, we also believe that Christ will return to earth as king, and we say these words in our Eucharistic Prayer, that Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again. When Christ returns, he will come as King. It won't be as a weak baby but as ruler of the world, as the true Creator that he is. Paul tells us that Jesus is the ruler of everything created, in heaven, or earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers –everything is created by him, and for him: he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church.

As disciples of Christ, we wait for his kingly return, although no one knows when that could be. It might be in our lifetimes; it might be in another thousand years. Although as we wait, we are purposeful. Our waiting is not passive. It's not like standing at a bus stop, although we could say that in our modern age, we are all used to waiting purposefully as we can look at our emails and messages from our smartphones wherever we are. As we wait, we are changed into the likeness of Christ, as we follow him day in and day out. Surely the purpose of this passage is to remind us of who is really in charge, that we serve a Servant King, that he is our true ruler, and that our lives need to be framed in the same way as his. That distractions like wealth, power and fame are only useful if they can help build the kingdom of God. And that as Jesus will return one day, there will be justice. Those who are currently oppressed, the poor, the weak, the downtrodden, those who have lost everything to travel to another country for refuge, will be raised up

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when Jesus returns. This is all part of the good news of Jesus Christ which we celebrate this day.

The popular poet Malcolm Guite wrote a powerful poem for the feast of Christ the King. It's inspired by the current discussion about migrants and I'd like to share with you here:

Our King is calling from the hungry furrows  
Whilst we are cruising through the aisles of plenty,  
Our hoardings screen us from the man of sorrows,  
Our soundtracks drown his murmur: 'I am thirsty'.  
He stands in line to sign in as a stranger  
And seek a welcome from the world he made,  
We see him only as a threat, a danger,  
He asks for clothes, we strip-search him instead.  
And if he should fall sick then we take care  
That he does not infect our private health,  
We lock him in the prisons of our fear  
Lest he unlock the prison of our wealth.  
But still on Sunday we shall stand and sing  
The praises of our hidden Lord and King.

**AMEN.**

### **Some questions for you:**

What aspects of Jesus' kingship are easy or difficult for you to accept?

What does it mean for Jesus to be king of your life?

What might Jesus be saying to you today?

Let's pray,

God our Father, today we give thanks for Jesus, for showing us his reign of service and humility. May we respond to his call to rule in our lives today. In Jesus' name.

AMEN.