

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY OLJ St Andrew's (Christ the King) 2021 dtw

John 18.36 *Jesus answered Pilate, "My Kingdom is not from this world".*

Patterns of Leadership today offer little scope for the exercise of kingship or queenship. Monarchy as absolute or divine right has long since been tamed constitutionally into something strictly limited. Royalty itself has been often trivialized by that great leveler the media, while lately the Windsors have certainly had quite a surge of popularity, particularly with Wills, Kate and children. (while Harry and Meghan are now much less favoured, and Andrew is in the dog house). But still holding it and all of us together, is Elizabeth our gracious Queen, somewhat fragile herself at the moment, as Charles remains in waiting.

Yet personal rule remains as an alternative to forms of government by remote control and systems which may supply adequate safeguards against everything except themselves. Given ambition and emotion, the next generation of computers and robots, apparently quite imminent, could be quite scary characters indeed. On the other hand, we cannot help admiring the brave way in which people like Nelson Mandela of South Africa and earlier, Mahatma Gandhi of India, endeavoured to hold things together by strong personal influence against seemingly overwhelming social, political and economic odds. What a stark contrast to the absolutism of tyrants like the now late Robert Mugabe or the fundamentalist fanaticism of ISIS. The stand-over tactics of the US have not always been the moral western alternative by any stretch. On the contrary, many would argue that the world is less safe or free as a consequence of *retaliation* to 9/11/ 2001 and that terrorism has reached much greater levels since the so called 'war on terror'. Can you see it ever going *down* by such measures? Repaying violence with violence has never worked.

This last Sunday of the Christian year is marked as *Christ the King* or *The Reign of Christ*. Ironically, Jesus was crucified as a mock king by people seeking to safeguard prevailing political and religious systems rather than recognize the absolute claims of God upon their lives. Even the disciples of Jesus were confused about his real role. When Peter made the declaration to Him: "You are the Christ", the kind of Christ that Peter wanted and the Christ he got were two quite different Messiahs. Jesus goes on to tell his followers that he would suffer and die for the sake of his cause. Peter blurts out that this "must never happen", to which Jesus reacts, "Get behind me Satan – you are not on the side of God, but of human desire!" (Mt 16.23) Peter was no doubt hoping for a leader who would place Israel in an invincible position instead of their then puppet status. How far removed was this in fact from the true vocation of the Christ who would say to Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" – that is, not of this world's terms and ideas of status and power and privilege.

In stark contrast to the way of tyranny, greed, oppression, injustice, Jesus would advocate blessing on the poor in spirit, on the peacemakers, on non-violence, on those hungry and thirsty for righteousness and those persecuted for the sake of justice. Jesus did get a crown, not of jewel encrusted gold, but thorns; a throne, yes, high and lifted up, but a roughhewn wooden scaffold in the shape of a cross on the town dump. Here, so passionately, yet so humbly is your Servant Leader, the King of Love, nailed down by love – amazing love. His values? - The way of giving, not grabbing, the way of steadfastness, not shiftiness, the way of charity, not fault-finding, not 'goody-goody' as the world may suspect of church people, but rather as seeking the highest good in and for others. Even a criminal hanging on a cross next to Jesus in his final excruciating hour could see the painful,

ironic wonder and glory of it all. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”. Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23. 42,43).

The distinctive hallmark of Jesus’ life and death is found in his words, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45) Authentic Christian leadership is by definition **Servant leadership**. Service will be the hallmark of our stewardship as citizens of the Kingdom. If Christ is to reign in my life, what must I do? Become a servant. What is life like in *this* Kingdom? the hungry are fed, the thirsty are given something to drink, strangers are welcomed, the naked are clothed, the sick and the prisoners are visited and cared for. These are just a few things that the Christians of St Andrew’s and the Order of St Lazarus will be doing if we’re following this Servant King. This is *what it is like* when Jesus is reigning in the church and in the world. The prophet Micah gave us all a great Kingdom line to remember personally by heart’ “What does the Lord require of me but to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with my God” (Micah 6.8). *(rpt)* And when Jesus came along centuries later, He was Micah 6.8 made flesh and dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. I love the bumper sticker with a twist that read, *If you love Jesus, do justice; anyone can honk!*

The gospels present Jesus as a person of authentic authority *because* he was truly a humble servant. Jesus doesn’t just talk the talk; he walks the walk, all the way to his cross. His authority finds expression in acts of compassionate love that bring healing and hope. This is radically different from dominating authority, top-down authority. Dominating authority achieves its purpose through coercion, manipulation, bargaining, bullying; it crushes its opposition into submission to achieve its ends. Jesus flatly opposes this kind of authority, saying, *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you.* (Mk 10.42-43) I’m sure you have met people in your life who like to ‘lord it over others’ – to ‘make their authority felt’. Jesus forbids the use of dominating power in his community. As such, he does not reject authority; he embodies and encourages a unique form – an authentic form – modeled on the position of a servant – aligning himself and his followers with the powerless, that they might be empowered. His is the authority of the towel with which he wipes the feet of his disciples.

The community of Jesus’ disciples is to be a new community where authority is exercised in a context of mutual and equal respect and love. Sadly, down the Christian centuries, so much ‘authority’ in the Church that Jesus founded has been the very authority he came to condemn. (Lord, have mercy) Today’s society provides us with ample opportunities for exercising our servant responsibility to take up the cross with all the gravity and wonder of its outrageous summons to radical discipleship. The cross has two beams, two beams to remind every Christian of the whole duty and cost of discipleship. The vertical beam pitches you between earth and heaven, keeps your eyes focused on God. It is the beam of adoration, worship and surrender to the Divine will. The horizontal beam places your heart and hands outstretched in the selfless service and love of your sisters and brothers in this world, all of them quite different to you. Just as much as you love and serve them, you love and serve Jesus. If you leave one or other of those cross-beams out of your life, you haven’t got a cross or a genuine faith to take anywhere.

In Philippians 2, we are told that what is needed in our community is the ‘mind of Christ’. Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped at, but ‘emptied himself’ taking the form of a servant. Taking on this mind and model of authority means the end of the ego, and the beginning of extravagant servant ministry and leadership. May this alternative lifestyle be our hallmark. Amen.