

Reflection for Reign of Christ Sunday November 23, 2025
by Jennifer Irving

While I was driving home from the hospital on Friday night, I caught the tail end of the final lecture of the 2025 CBC Massey Lectures called “Universal: Renewing Human Rights in a Fractured World” presented by Human Rights lawyer and self-professed “Human Rights Believer”, Alex Neve. Which I highly recommend to you all, by the way. And, as I was listening to that series, it struck me that Jesus Christ was an amazing champion of human rights.

In all the stories that we have been listening to about Jesus leading up to this reign of Christ Sunday, we are shown Jesus’ amazing capacity to see people as people—worthy of respect and love and comfort and care, no matter what their circumstances—even criminals being sentenced to death for their crimes.

Even while being mocked himself and stripped of his own human rights and dignity, Jesus prays for forgiveness for those involved, responds to hatred and vitriol with understanding, and speaks a word of comfort to the one who needs it the most.

At bible study, I wondered what the people who had decided on our Revised Common Lectionary (the bible readings set for each Sunday in the year on a rotating 3 year schedule) were thinking when they put this reading from Luke on the Reign of Christ Sunday. But when I thought of Jesus through the lens of a human rights advocate, I wondered if maybe that is what that groups of ministers, biblical scholars and church leaders were thinking when they did this.

Because this passage shows Jesus as the opposite of what most people would consider a good leader—he is at his weakest and everyone knows leaders should be strong—he’s been stripped of all dignity—heck we call leaders “dignitaries” so they definitely should be dignified. And what power does he wield from a cross? Not very powerful or mighty at all.

Yet, from this very place, Jesus shows us that just as we are, without pomp and no matter what our circumstance, we can listen to one another, love one another, be a light to one another, offer hope and comfort to one another. And that, in doing so, we prove just how powerful we really are. This passage shows us that it is love that rules in God’s kingdom. Only love.

In this fifth and final Massey lecture, in which Alex Neve offers a way forward for Canada towards Universal Human Rights, he encourages us to truly listen to one another and refrain from responding to insults with insults, hatred with hatred, and lies with lies. Jesus could have responded to the first criminal mocking him with insults and mockery right back—God knows I might have—but he doesn’t. He listens to both men and then offers grace-filled reassurance “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

What would the world look like if we truly lived in a place where this love of Christ, this reign of Christ, is lived out? If we really believe in and championed human rights as Jesus did?

Alex Neve exhorts us to:

forge the world in which...we stand together in solidarity with those whose rights are on the line. In doing so we make it clear that we are not indifferent to genocide, to a burning planet, to sexism, racism and discrimination, to erasing trans lives, to shutting borders to refugees, to homelessness and we are certainly not indifferent to our responsibility to advance rights regarding reconciliation with indigenous peoples. We are not indifferent to efforts that tear down our common humanity and we are not indifferent to breaking the promise of universal human rights... We must join in to show that everyone, every single one of us, does belong and that we will not allow anyone to be left to the side.

It seems to me that this is exactly what Jesus models and calls us to as his bold disciples. And, I believe that it is when we are able to do so, that the reign of Christ will truly be realized here on earth.

“When we believe, when we are empowered and bound together in solidarity, when we spread the word and protest, when we overcome doubt by making human rights real, when we defend human rights, when we set out to make change happen even against enormous odds, we can and do prevail!” (Alex Neve, 2025 Massey Lectures)

Thanks be to God.