

Sam 5:1-3; Ps 121; Col 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43

‘What is troubling you?’, Mary asked.

‘I do not know what to say’

‘For what?’

‘For the Solemnity of Christ the King.’

‘Really, you are short of words?’, she asked with a smile on her lips

‘Well, it is more like I have too much to say, and I do not know what I should choose to say, there are so many words and images and they are just a jumble, and I cannot sort it out.’

‘Tell me.’

‘You know it all already, my Lady.’

‘Tell me anyway. Let me hear what you wish to say of my Son’

‘As you wish.’

I want the Church to remember that the Jewish people did not always have kings. Before the Kings they were ruled by Judges who served as prophets and military leaders. The Judges protected Israel and led them in following God, but when a good judge died the people often started running after other gods.¹ Being a Judge was an inherited position, and that did not work very well either. The sons of Samuel, who was himself great prophet, were corrupt and lazy, and so the Israelites ask him for a King instead.² They

said to him: *‘You are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us king to govern us like all the nations.’*³ It was not just because the judges had become corrupt that the people want a king, they also wanted to be like the nations that surrounded them: Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites and Philistines, who all had kings. They saw it as a path to glory and power. Samuel asked God to turn down their request but God answers, *‘Listen to the voice of the people’*. God does not grant the request because he thinks it is a good idea, but because the Israelites have stopped following Him. So, they get their King, and their desire granted is also their punishment.

‘What else?’, she prompted.

The first King is Saul, who despite all he has been given, - perhaps because of it - turns away from God and worships demons and consults a witch. He dies in battle. David is raised up in his place. David becomes a great king. With David God makes a promise that *‘your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.’*⁴ So high is David’s standing in the eyes of the Jewish people that there are numerous references to him throughout the Psalms and books of the prophets that link him with God’s love for his people. Some of the writers of the Gospels go to great pains to detail how Jesus – son of Mary and the carpenter Joseph – is of the lineage of David:⁵

David is great in many ways, but he is also seriously flawed; passionate and exuberant, weak in self-control and lacking in judgment of his

¹ ed John Barton, The Oxford Bible Commentary: 1and2 Samuel. p204

² Around 1000 BC

³ 1 Sam 8: 4

⁴ Sam 2:16 (the covenant is more detailed and expansive in the prophetic word of Nathan 2:4-17. From this, through subsequent prophetic works expands the idea and vision of Davidic Israel.)

⁵ Luke 2, 3:23-31, Matt 1:1-16

own family. He is victorious in battle, but divides Israel. He is loving but adulterous. He goes to great lengths not to harm Saul, but he has Uriah killed. His saving grace - the reason he is smiled upon by God - is his ability to face his sins and be utterly repentant. And the kings that follow? They are by and large the ruin of Israel.

I want the people to know that this is the kind of ruler that the Jews were yearning for when Jesus started teaching and healing. They wanted a King who would make them great again, who was favoured by God and was a hero.

But it may mean little to their ears. After all, we live in a Constitutional Monarchy, where the king exercises little real power. We don't trust unlimited power, and for good reason. Furthermore, if someone today said that they wanted to make this country great again they would most likely be attacked for being xenophobes, or fascists. We might allow ourselves to be bribed by to vote for better broad-band, health care, green energy, or the right to kill ourselves and our babies, but don't accuse us of wanting to be great! We are a people who want a paper king or none at all; well, except ourselves.

2,000 years ago your Son turned out not to be the King that his people wanted, he was not someone would re-establish their power. Nor is he the King that we want today with no authority. *'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself',* cry out the soldiers.⁶ But he does not want to save himself: He wants to save us... He does not force us. He does not bribe us.

He only offers power over sin. He simply wants us to love Him as He loves us. His kingship continues to be the crown of thorns he wore on the cross.

'What else?'

I want to tell them not to stuff themselves with mince pies during Advent.

'What do you mean?'

We are waiting for your Jesus, the Son of God, to come again. At the same time we are celebrating his First Coming into the world. I want us to be able to celebrate Christmas by making space for him, not by being so bloated with pre-Christmas mince pies and punch, and parties that we have fed and shopped ourselves into such a stupor that we hardly even notice when it does come or that we are glad when it is over. I want some silence. I want...

'You think you want to summarise now.' Mary gently interjected.

I want us to remember prayer, and fasting and almsgiving because this is a season of repentance. I want us to prepare for the King of Heaven this Advent by making space, and *then* feast and rejoice at least until Epiphany when he comes instead of going on a diet. That is what I want.... That's it. I think I'm done.

'Amen', she said. She gave a gentle smile, inclined her head and was gone.

⁶ Luke 23:40