

Sermon - Crowned as King

Based on: Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14; Psalm 132.1-12; Revelation 1.4b-8; John 18.33-37

Relatable images

- All of today's readings point to the Kingship of Christ. They provide a resource for acclamations of praise in acknowledgement of Jesus, our King.
- Nevertheless, the notion of Jesus Christ as King can seem, for many people, a concept that is difficult to relate to in a tangible everyday way.
- Two images come to mind that might help us engage better with the concept of Christ as King.
- The first is that of an athlete winning a race, and then stepping up onto the winner's podium to receive both the gold medal and the acclaim of the crowd.
- The second is that of the heir to a modern day king or queen, finally stepping up to become the next king or queen, and being crowned as such at the coronation ceremony.

Marathon winner

- I viewed some of the Olympics in Tokyo earlier this year, and while I enjoy watching many of the various events, I find own body responding the most with the running.
- The shorter sprint races are amazing with the powerful burst of energy required, but it is the longer races that can hold the dramatic tension, as runners strategise according to a number of factors: the clock, the conditions of the course, the other runners, and with how their own body is responding at the time.
- Whereas the winner of the 100 metre sprint is feted as the fastest person, it is the marathon that provides the concluding drama, with the winners of the women's and men's races being awarded their medals at the closing ceremony.
- I invite you to picture two moments:
- The first is when the winner crosses the finishing line, having trained for years, having travelled to get to the race, having made their final physical and mental preparations, having actually run the race, and having exerted themselves to the utmost - and as they cross the finishing line they might be able to comprehend little else other than: 'I have done it! It is finished!'
- They might then collapse, and lie down, exhausted.

- Later on is the second moment that you can picture in your imagination.
- The winner has washed the sweat and grime from their body, has put on clean comfortable clothes, and - while their body might ache - they are fully engaged with what's happening.
- Their name is announced, they step onto the podium, and they lift their arms in triumph.
- And the stadium full of people roars their delight and praise, in full acknowledgement of the winner's effort and achievement.
- The winner bows their head so that the gold medal can be placed around their neck, and they are given a bunch of flowers which they can hold aloft.
- Their country's flag is raised, and their national anthem is played, and they are applauded again.

Jesus' marathon

- Now I didn't tell you to think of Jesus while I was giving this description - but some of you might have been making a mental comparison anyway.
- Jesus also prepared and trained for his own marathon.
- During the thirty years before he started his ministry, he would have been doing more than just carpentry.
- Don't forget the kind of people his parents were, who taught him their own devote faith.

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- Don't forget that Jesus was already debating with the scribes in the temple at the age of twelve.
- So that by the time he came to his baptism, Jesus was ready for his final preparation in the wilderness.
- And then his three year ministry marathon started, and he had to negotiate a way forward with fickle companions, with ignorant crowds, with confrontational religious leaders.
- Like a marathon runner picking up water and snacks at a refreshment station, so Jesus would frequently refresh himself with prayer, and with visiting kind friends.
- Today's Gospel reading is an excerpt of Jesus coming in sight of the stadium again, as it were, knowing that he would soon be entering the final lap of the 400 meter track, leading to Golgotha and the cross.
- And hanging suspended from the cross in agony, he finally cries out as he crosses the line: 'It is finished!', and collapses.
- Later, having had the sweat and filth washed away, and wearing clean clothes, he steps up to receive the praise and acclaim he deserves, for what he has achieved.
- And what is it that Jesus has achieved?
- He has manifestly shown
 - how God's love overcomes hate,
 - how God's light overcomes darkness, and
 - how God's life overcomes death.
- And Jesus enables anyone and everyone to participate with him in this transformational power, and to celebrate life eternal - that is, life in all its fullness.
- No wonder our services of worship name Jesus with acclaim, and we offer gifts of precious gold and of natural beauty.
- Christ's banner is raised in whatever form might be meaningful to us - typically as the cross, but also in other symbols, such as the lamb - which we have as part of the symbol of St John's church.
- And the anthem of God's kingdom is sung: an anthem of many languages and melodies, but all giving glory to the 'Ancient One', using Daniel's description, and to 'one like a human being':
 - To him was given dominion*
 - and glory and kingship,*
 - that all peoples, nations, and languages*
 - should serve him.*
 - His dominion is an everlasting dominion*
 - that shall not pass away,*
 - and his kingship is one*
 - that shall never be destroyed. (Daniel 7.14)*
- And every time we glorify God in our worship, and particularly praise Jesus for what God has accomplished through him, then we are expressing our wondrous acknowledgement of the spiritual marathon that Jesus ran and won, for all to benefit from.

The British throne

- At the beginning of my sermon I mentioned a second, quite different image.
- This is about an actual king or queen being crowned.
- There are still a number of monarchies around the world, but I'm going to stick with the one with which I am the most familiar - the British royal family.
- On the 6th of February next year, Queen Elizabeth will be celebrating 70 years on the throne, having already broken many records of longevity.

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- Consequently only a small portion of the peoples of the British Commonwealth can remember her coronation ceremony, which took place over a year after her accession to the throne.
- I had to resort to a Wikipedia article to read about it:

During the service, Elizabeth took an oath, was anointed with holy oil, was invested with robes and regalia, and was crowned queen of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

(Wikipedia: Coronation of Elizabeth II)

Right of the firstborn

- Compared to the marathon runner, Elizabeth had done nothing to deserve being made queen.
- Any accomplishments or abilities were irrelevant.
- She simply had to be the first-born to the man who became king.
- For Brits who are royalists, or who are content to keep the status quo of the constitutional monarchy, this is not a problem - it is an accepted aspect of how royal succession works.
- Thus the expectation is that Prince Charles is next in line to the British throne - and then his son Prince William, and then William's eldest, Prince George.
- In the same way Jesus' right to the throne is treated as being constitutional in both worldly terms and in spiritual terms.
- Today's Psalm 132 refers to the great king of Israel, King David, and foretells of one in the psalm writer's future who will ultimately succeed David on the throne:

The Lord has sworn to David:

an oath which he will not break;

'One who is the fruit of your body:

I will set upon your throne.

'If your children will keep my covenant and the commands which I teach them:

their children also shall sit upon your throne for ever.' (Psalm 132.10-12)

- Jesus' lineage is traced back, in both Matthew's and Luke's gospel accounts, through King David.
- And blind Bartimaeus acknowledges this when he calls out: '*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*' (Mark 10.47)
- Today's reading from Revelation adds an additional aspect, to show Jesus as having a spiritual right to the heavenly throne, describing him as '*firstborn of the dead*' - that is, the firstborn of those who undergo the resurrection into the heavenly kingdom.

The centre of right order

- The second aspect of the royal throne that applies to Jesus is a more ancient one.
- Before the British throne became a constitutional monarchy, the reigning king or queen did exactly that, reigning both politically and often militarily.
- Their role was one of central authority, and when they died, it was vitally important to have their successor proclaimed as king - or queen - so as to maintain order.
- The cry would go up: 'The king is dead. Long live the king!'
- This would be a reassurance that while one king had died, the next king was already in place, and the order of the state was maintained.
- And so this is the final aspect of Jesus' role as king that I want to highlight.
- Christ the King occupies the throne at the centre of divine authority, maintaining the right ordering of God's kingdom.
- When all the citizens of God's kingdom are in right alignment with God - through Jesus - then everyone and everything is right-wisely ordered.

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- When speaking to Pontius Pilate:
Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' (John 18.37)
- As followers and disciples of Jesus, we are called to keep focused on the centre, and follow the example of Christ as King.
- When we do this, as the psalmist has written:
*'If your children will keep my covenant
and the commands which I teach them:
their children also shall sit upon your throne
for ever.'* (Psalm 132.12)
- While Jesus as the first-born of the resurrected, and as the son of David, and as the one who has accomplished God's purpose for all, is rightfully on the throne, he invites us to participate in his death and resurrection, in both this world and the next, and thereby enter into his glory with him.
- So today especially, and every Sunday, we offer up our praise to the glory of the one who is our King:
Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. (Revelation 5.12)