

## **Christ be our Leader Reign of Christ – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2010**

***Readings:***

**Col. 1:11-20, Luke 23: 33-43**

**God, our rock and refuge, we come to you this morning, feeling perplexed because our lives are buffeted by the winds of change. We search for people and beliefs to anchor our lives, but often we search in vain. Our politicians and civic leaders often disappoint. Even in our churches there are leaders who preach one thing and do another. Help us always to look to Jesus the Christ as the author of our faith. Help us always to follow his lead and in the following, bring reconciliation to a divided world. AMEN.**

Years ago, when Jenny and I were bringing up our three girls, we used to be visited by a male relative whose first question on entering our house was always, "Where's the boss?" Now I think he was referring to me, but in a household of 4 women and one man, that is a very contentious question to ask. I never had the heart to correct him.

But I believe this is even more a question for our age. Who is the boss? Just who is in charge around here? In so many areas you begin to wonder. At one stage not all that long ago, you could make the claim safely that our government, our politicians were in the charge. But not any more.

I think they're leaving leadership to someone called Free Enterprise, and even there, after the GFC, we're beginning to see the feet of clay in entrepreneurial leadership.

We'd really like to look up to our leaders but increasingly we are seeing their flaws, or more often, are being shown their deficiencies by a self-righteous media. Mind you the politicians themselves don't help their own cause. Think of the number of politicians who have found themselves before the courts in the past decade. We long for selfless leadership, and become disillusioned when they fail to meet our high expectations. Public servants, real public servants have become an endangered species.

And in other parts of the world it is even easier to see that politicians are no longer in charge. Multi-national companies, obscenely rich entrepreneurs, seem to call the shots. Look at Burma, look at Russia, look at the U.S. Politicians and business leaders seem more interested in serving themselves than in serving their communities and nations. In an attempt to rectify these trends, where can we go? Who is in charge around here?

This is the Reign of Christ Sunday, and as Christians we believe that the best model for all leadership is to be found in Jesus the Christ. Listen as I tell you a couple of stories of leaders who I believe knew how to lead people in the same selfless manner that Jesus the Christ leads.

The first story concerns the King of Denmark. During the Second World War, when Nazi armies were in almost every country in Europe, King Christian of Denmark stubbornly

resisted the Nazis. His country was quite small compared to powerful Germany and the king knew he could not win on the battlefield, but there were other ways of resistance. One day he observed the Nazi swastika flag flying above one of his public buildings. He gently reminded the German commander that this was contrary to the treaty signed between the two nations. And so he told the German general that the flag would have to be removed by 12.00 noon, otherwise he would send a soldier to remove it. At five to twelve the flag was still flying and the king announced he was sending a soldier to pull it down. "The soldier will be shot." the Nazi officer said. Then King Christian replied, "I think I should tell you that I will be that soldier."

Now there was a leader. One that lived up to his name - King Christian. A leader who was willing to give up his life for his people. A leader who was willing to stand up to evil oppression.

A leader who truly loved those whom he served. A leader very much like Christ the king.

The second story is of a man who I believe was one of the great figures of the 20th Century. A man imprisoned for 29 years for standing up for justice and righteousness. A man who was regarded as a leader even when he was in chains, whose moral authority managed to transform a country. That man is Nelson Mandela. A leader who was willing to sacrifice his all for the people of South Africa. A leader who came to reconcile and through the Truth Commission sought to reconcile all the rainbow people of South Africa. A leader who understood what true forgiveness is all about. A leader very much like Christ the king.

Both our readings this morning point to the kind of leadership that Christ provides for us. In Colossians we read of that leadership, of a Christ in whom the fullness of God dwells. A Christ through whom all of Creation will be reconciled to God. A Christ who will make peace through his acceptance of death on a Cross.

Which brings us to our Gospel reading that starkly demonstrates what leadership should be about. A leader so unlike most of our leaders of today. A leader who eschews force of arms, who not only talked of turning the other cheek, but lived it out to his death. A leader like no other, who is not seduced by wealth or territory, who chooses to live simply with attachment to the things that last - love of God and compassion for God's creation. A leader like no other, who chooses to forgive when he is wronged, who chooses forgiveness and love over conquest and oppression as the only way to win over the hearts of people. A leader like no other, who does not need to be wealthy to rule (like so many of our present age), whose richness is in selfless living and dying and rising.

By worldly standards Jesus does not make the grade as a leader. The very manner of his death seems to point to defeat rather victory, and yet, and yet here we are along with millions of others willing to follow a leader like Jesus. Why is that?

Well perhaps it's because we know that in Christ we have a leader who knows and cares for us. One who knows what it is to suffer pain, one who knows how frail his subjects are in the face of evil but accepts us all the same. And a leader willing to forgive us no matter what.

After all he is the Christ who prays to his father to forgive his torturers. A leader who brings a new deal, a new beginning.

Now there is a leader you would want to follow, one you could trust with your life. A leader who truly brings people together. One who leads by serving.

But sadly I fear one that would probably be ejected from our parliaments.

And finally, lest you feel that leadership is males-only business, let me finish with a story of a queen who clearly took Jesus the Christ as her example and who tried to live her life as one of his followers. The queen was from Hawaii, her name Lili'uokalani.....

Queen Lili'uokalani only reigned in Hawaii from 1891 to 1893, when she was deposed by a group of American businessmen who sought annexation with the United States. At the time she was overthrown, she was in the process of promulgating a new constitution that would have restored rights to the native Hawaiian people.

Later arrested for treason by the Provisional Government, she was imprisoned in a room of the royal palace in Honolulu. During her imprisonment she made a quilt (still on display in the royal palace) that tells the history of the Hawaiian people, and wrote several hymns, the most famous being the "The Queen's Prayer" in which she asks God to forgive her captors. This hymn is still sung throughout Hawaii, often on a weekly basis in churches of various denominations. Traditionally it is sung only in Hawaiian.

Apologies are often hard for governments and churches to make, but in 1993 in commemorating the centenary of the overthrow, several groups made apologies for the mistreatment of the Hawaiian people a hundred years previous. The United Church of Christ, successors to the Congregational Missionaries who first brought Christianity to Hawaii, apologised for their predecessors' complicity in the overthrow. In servant leadership reminiscent of the Christ and indeed the Hawaiian queen, modern day leaders at last apologised.

Listen as I read you the Queen's Prayer, a prayer born of grace and reflecting Christ's prayer as he hung on a cross.

***O God, your loving mercy is as high as the heavens.  
It tells us of your truth and is filled with holiness.  
While humbly meditating within these walls,  
you are my light and my support.  
Do not look upon the failings of these mortals;  
forgive them with your loving kindness,  
that we may all be made pure.  
Grant us grace and bring us under your protection;  
then I know that peace will be our portion  
now and forever.  
AMEN.***

*Pilgrim Uniting Church  
Rev. Tony Duncan - Sermon*

Now that's what I call servant leadership.

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