

King of Kings

Lawrence Peak November 22nd 2020

In March 2017 Dianne and I were fortunate enough to take a cruise of South East Asia including Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand, and we saw many things we had not experienced before – including countless temples, Buddhas in all sorts of poses – sitting, meditating and even reclining. Great devotion and holiness and gold as far as the eye could see.

Whilst travelling through Thailand, wherever we went we saw monuments, shrines, beautifully and quite solidly built, and draped in black around all of them, and in the centre of each was a photo of the late King who died on 13th October 2016.

After his death, an entire year of mourning was declared and these memorial monuments were constructed all over the country. He was a much loved monarch indeed.

As I just mentioned, he died on 13th October the year before, and these memorials were still around when we were touring. He was the ninth monarch of Thailand, Having reigned since 9 June 1946, he was, at the time of his death, the world's longest-serving head of state and the longest-reigning monarch in Thai history, serving for 70 years, 126 days. During his reign, he was served by a total of 30 prime ministers.

He was much revered by the people of Thailand; many even saw him as close to divine.

Roughly eleven years before on Saturday April 29th 2006 the King of Thailand stepped in to defuse months of turmoil and angry demonstrations which had paralysed the Thai parliament in what was called a soap opera of revolt and belligerence. Almost immediately all sides in the war pitting the Prime Minister's regime against a mosaic of opposition parties and people power groups were now committed to compromise. This was not the first occasion when the King, who was universally loved by virtually all Thais, stepped in to restore law and order and calm.

Why did this happen? Was it because of armed troops or tanks or threats of imprisonment? And maybe worse? No, it happened because of two main factors that no-one in the country would dispute.

Firstly, the King was above the wrangling and the petty politics. He displayed grace and a deep love for his country and a fairness in his approach to situations of conflict. If you like he was operating on a higher

plane than the day to day skirmishing that took place in the Parliament. People looked up to him, people respected him.

Secondly and almost paradoxically he was loved because he was not in any way remote and removed - but right there in the midst of his people. Quoting from one web site at the time-

“I know of no other King who is so loved by his people whether Buddhist or Muslim and who loves his people so much and cares for them. The King of Thailand is always at work among his people of all walks of life, teaching, counselling, consoling. His charitable works are outstanding and his lifestyle is modest.”

I should add that certainly his son – King Vajiralongkorn - has nowhere near the stature of his father and has been the cause of recent demonstrations throughout Thailand – what with his lavish style of living, five wives and extensive periods of absence whilst living in Germany. The fact that he was in fact educated at King School Parramatta doesn't seem to have helped much! In many ways a dead loss – nothing like his late father.

But, good and noble as Thailand's old King undoubtedly was, he was not the King of Kings.

In this world of republics, it is interesting to note how many countries still have a royal monarchy who are usually loved and respected. Including Thailand, according to Google there are 28 countries including Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Japan, Norway, Jordan, Luxembourg, Cambodia, Malaysia, Belgium, Spain, Tonga and the United Arab Emirates.

The young royals from Britain, William and Kate also are much loved for much the same reasons as in Thailand,. They are young, they are fresh, they are dignified yet they are approachable and very likeable, they are not remote and they care.

William displays many of the characteristics of his late mum Diana. When William ascends to the throne. I am sure he will make a great King. However, he will not be the King of Kings.

That title I reserve for a man called Jesus who walked the shores of Galilee some 2000 years ago and who the Bible says has now a most special place in heaven – at the right hand of God the Father.

And, for me, there are again these two characteristics we have mentioned that command my love, honour and respect. There were no jewel studded crowns or thrones or palaces or royal chariots. There was no wealth or luxury, no servants or vassals for this King of Kings.

But Christ was on a higher plane if you like. He was closer to God than anyone in all history. He was above the petty bickering of the disciples jostling for prime positions in heaven, he was above the temptations that do so well in dragging us all down, he even seemed to have an empathy with nature itself leaving the disciples aghast and exclaiming “what manner of man is this that even the winds and the water obey him!” And he seemed to have an inside knowledge about God’s plan for mankind that no-one else has ever had. There was something “other” about Jesus, something special, something awesome about this man which led the centurion at the foot of the cross to exclaim “surely this man was the son of God”

Some of the greatest music ever composed, and some of the most stunning artwork ever created has been in honour of this Jesus of Nazareth – this humble Nazarene – this King of Kings.

And secondly – and here again is the paradox – he was amongst us all at the very lowest level. He knew about life warts and all – the life we struggle with daily – he knew about getting tired and dispirited, being disappointed, celebrating at wedding parties, he knew pain and anguish, he knew of the home comforts of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He knew a mother’s love and the rejection of his home town. He talked to us in parables using earthly examples with which all his hearers could relate. He knew life and it was and is our life.

These two things make him the King of Kings.

- A King who came from the very heights of heaven to stoop and wash his disciples’ feet.
- A King who came from a glory we cannot even begin to understand to struggle with a cross and a crown of thorns and a purple robe along a dusty road at Calvary.
- A King who came from a heavenly host of angels singing in adoration to the jeering of a mocking crowd.

- A King who came from the most intimate fellowship possible with God His Father to cry out “My God my God why hast thou forsaken me?” on a lonely cross.

In an intriguing interview, Pontius Pilate asks of Jesus “You are a King then?”

Jesus replies

“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”

Pilate has never met anyone quite like Jesus of Nazareth. He knew about kings, some powerful, some brutal, (Pilate himself was very brutal) some building their empires and kingdoms at all costs. But he has never met anyone quite like Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate is not quite sure who is in charge but he senses that Christ is indeed a King. In a final acknowledgement he puts a notice on the cross Jesus of Nazareth – King of the Jews. When goaded to replace it with “He said he was the king of the Jews” Pilate stuck to his guns.

But Pilate didn’t get that quite right! He is not just King of the Jews but he is King of all Kings and of all people. Because he lived and died we can come to know God with an intimacy never before imagined.

Christianity asserts very triumphantly that this Jesus rose from the tomb and is alive today in the most real sense. The glory of Easter day celebrates an empty tomb. He is alive, he is modern, he didn’t just live 2000 years ago. He epitomises a hope we can all have – that life continues in a most glorious way – a life that continues with God our Father.

Because he is the Son of God and sits at God’s right hand we have an advocate who has lived like us and who understands all the pitfalls that can lie on the paths we take.

Praise and honour be to Jesus the Christ, our Lord, our saviour, our redeemer and our King Amen