



## Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

### The Rule of Christ: ‘Busting Mythologies’



On this last day of the Christian year – the reign of Christ – we think about the meaning of Jesus, what he points us towards. Today, perhaps even more than other Sundays, we are given to understand that being a Christian, while including the experience of personal conversion, does not end there. In fact, Christ is significant, not just because of Himself, but because of what He represents and gives full expression to – the kingdom, the rule or the reign of God. Now this reign has broad markers that identify it, and the Gospel for today, Matthew 25:31-46, sets those markers out quite clearly. This is not a statement that is negotiable, “a-take-it-or-leave-it-thing”: it sits at the very epicentre of what Christian faith means, in our relationships and in the public square. In essence, this Sunday encapsulates the Christian conviction that we live in an upside-down world, where ‘kingdoms’ or powers rule in their own exclusive interests. The rule of Christ, we hear, is different: it is about the world set right. As we think about the fact of power in our communities, nations and beyond to the global situation, the challenge is to imagine and work for a world seen through the lens of Jesus Christ and the reign of God.

## GATHERING

### Announcements

#### Invitation to Worship

In the name of God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you  
**And also with you**

#### Lighting the Paschal Candle

**Hymn: “I danced in the morning” (TiS 242, Lord of the Dance, Sydney Carter)**

#### Opening Prayers: Is That You?

The Gospel reading this morning is the high-point of Matthew’s theology and ethics. The story of the Great Judgment is Matthew’s call to his community to never presume upon God’s grace, to never assume that it can be reduced to a diluted understanding of ‘personal salvation’, unable to see beyond to the bigger picture. God’s generosity expressed in Jesus Christ, is to be understood as the path, the means to generosity lived out *beyond* ourselves, lived out across the social boundaries that we usually consciously or unconsciously generate for ourselves. Grace is all about using our imagination for creative ends, busting our defensive mythologies which we construct, not just because it is a good thing to do, but because God in Christ *is in the other* who unsettles and challenges me. In this poem, I use the metaphor of winter – the reverse of our summer heat and bush-fires – to incorporate the idea of *the other: a solitary woman at McDonalds*.

The jittering snow-flakes chase one another  
in flight from the knuckles of wind

that sway the abandoned branches of trees  
in their inaudible dirge of loss

and scatter the dust that lines the street  
where blank windows stare at the grey.

A fragment of newspaper rolls by, revealing and hiding  
its jumble of pain under clouds the colour of bruises.

And the torn creation seems to live in the lines  
of the face of this solitary woman,

old coat, buttoned high and frayed hat pulled hard  
on a forehead furrowed with years,

eyelids pinched from the chill of the air  
as she shifts, from one hand to the other,

the heavy weight of two bags that might  
carry all that she cares about today.

See how carefully she opens her thin wallet  
at the counter of the McDonald's.

How each coin is cradled like a departing child  
by wrinkled and shaking fingers.

How, when she lifts her face to yours and you  
smile, and she smiles in return of your greeting

something crosses the space between you  
like a bridge spanning unseen waters

and across that bridge moves a gentle light,  
a glow of kindness, of friendship, of grace.

Is that you in those eyes, O Beloved Redeemer,  
in that smile, in that bridge, in that light?

***Is that you in the lines on all our weathered faces,  
in all our hands that count out life's coins?***

Grant me grace to see you looking back at me  
with the love you have for all creation,

***to see you, O King, in all of your glory,  
beneath the folds of each old hat, worn coat.***

***Amen***

**The Peace**

## HEARING THE WORD

### Some Preliminary Thoughts About Imagination that Challenges the Mythologies We Generate for Ourselves

That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behoves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping, we are becoming.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

The corporate revolution characterized by free-market chaos, will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

**Arundhati Roy**

It is clear that a world order favourable for a few and unfavourable for most, is something that dehumanizes and de-Christianizes each person, and humanity itself. Whatever alienation, action, or omission that makes another human being a foreigner, breaks down the humanity of the one who behaves this way.

**Ignacio Ellacuría**

#### **Ezekiel 34:16-24 (Good News Translation)**

**Ezekiel was a prophet whose ministry spanned the tumultuous time from just before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE to around 563 BCE, i.e. into the time of exile in Babylon. His message contains words of judgment and comfort: judgment for the leaders and others who had betrayed God’s ways of justice; and comfort and hope to those who were in exile and despair, In the verses immediately preceding the lectionary passage for this week, the prophet Ezekiel proclaims judgment for the shepherd kings of Israel. Instead of caring for the sheep, they have ruled them with harshness, feeding themselves and not their flocks. In response, the Lord promises to put a stop to the abusive power of the kings. Written during the time following the exile, these verses look back and ascribe the present state of affairs to the brutality and apostasy of the kings.**

<sup>16</sup> “I will look for those that are lost, bring back those that wander off, bandage those that are hurt, and heal those that are sick; but those that are fat and strong I will destroy, because I am a shepherd who does what is right.

<sup>17</sup> “Now then, my flock, I, the Sovereign LORD, tell you that I will judge each of you and separate the good from the bad, the sheep from the goats. <sup>18</sup> Some of you are not satisfied with eating the best grass; you even trample down what you don't eat! You drink the clear water and muddy what you don't drink! <sup>19</sup> My other sheep have to eat the grass you trample down and drink the water you muddy.

<sup>20</sup> “So now, I, the Sovereign LORD, tell you that I will judge between you strong sheep and the weak sheep. <sup>21</sup> You pushed the sick ones aside and butted them away from the flock. <sup>22</sup> But I will rescue my sheep and not let them be mistreated any more. I will judge each of my sheep and separate the good from the bad. <sup>23</sup> I will give them a king like my servant David to be their one shepherd, and he will take care of them. <sup>24</sup> I, the LORD, will be their God, and a king like my servant David will be their ruler. I have spoken.

The word of the Lord  
***Thanks be to God***

### **Luke 1:68-79 - in place of the Psalm (NRSV)**

It might seem strange to some that for a psalm this week we have a passage from a Gospel. We noted a few weeks ago that the practice of inserting ‘psalms’ or songs into biblical narratives is not unusual. In fact, in Luke’s Gospel we have three such ‘psalms’/songs inserted in the first couple of chapters: Luke 1:46-55, called *The Magnificat* and related to 1 Sam 2:1-10; Luke 2:29-32, called Simeon’s song or *The Nunc Dimittis*; and today’s ‘psalm’, Luke 1:68-79 known as the song of Zachariah or *The Benedictus*. These three ‘Lukan’ songs were gathered, together with many of the psalms/songs appearing in various narrative contexts in the Old Testament, and appended to the end of the Book of Psalms in early The Song of Zechariah is a psalm of thanksgiving at the beginning, vv. 68-75. It gives thanks to the Lord for deliverance for his people, Israel. Of course, the psalm is to be read in relation to the birth of Jesus even though that has not happened yet. We have only had the visit of Mary, while pregnant with Jesus, to Elizabeth, John’s mother. While a psalm of thanksgiving, it anticipates the very deliverance it celebrates. As such it bears many of the themes that undergird the Christian hope of a messiah: from the house of David, spoken about by the prophets of old, a mercy promised to the ancestors long ago in covenant. In this context it epitomizes something about Advent and our Christian hope.

<sup>68</sup> “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup> that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. <sup>72</sup> Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to

grant us <sup>74</sup>that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup>in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup>And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup>to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. <sup>78</sup>By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, <sup>79</sup>to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

### **Matthew 25:31-46 (Good News Translation)**

**Matthew's Gospel climaxes at this point, with this imaginative vision, a vision of the judgement of all the nations. This is universal judgement. It is not just a judgement of Israel or of the church. What counts in this vision of world history, is our attitude and performance, toward the so called "little ones". Ultimately only love matters and Matthew's faith says love is never anonymous. Love is always a participation in Christ's love whether we label it so or not. This simple insight cuts across claims to privilege and all the religious, philosophical and social disqualifications which accompany them. Matthew levels all privilege, in the name of loving and understanding God as loving.**

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes as King and all the angels with him, he will sit on his royal throne, <sup>32</sup> and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the righteous people at his right and the others at his left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to the people on his right, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, <sup>36</sup> naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup> The righteous will then answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ <sup>40</sup> The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!’

<sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Away from me, you that are under God's curse! Away to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels! <sup>42</sup> I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink; <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger but you would not welcome me in your homes, naked but you would not

clothe me; I was sick and in prison but you would not take care of me.’<sup>44</sup> Then they will answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and we would not help you?’<sup>45</sup> The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.’<sup>46</sup> These, then, will be sent off to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go to eternal life.”

The Gospel of the Lord

**Praise to you Lord Christ**

**Hymn: “Lord hear my praying” – The Sorrowing Song (TiS 689, Lara, Robin Mann)**

We sing this alternating between each side of the congregation beginning from the left side of the church)

**A Film Clip “Au revoir les enfants” (1987, Producer and Director Luis Malle) 1:34:15 – 1:38:33**

During the winter of 1943–44, Julien Quentin, a student at a Carmelite boarding school in occupied France, is returning to school from vacation. He acts tough to the students at the school, but he is actually a pampered boy who misses his mother deeply. Saddened to be returning to the tedium of boarding school, Julien's classes seem uneventful until Père Jean, the headmaster, introduces three new pupils. One of them, Jean Bonnet, is the same age as Julien. Like the other students, Julien at first despises Bonnet, a socially awkward boy with a talent for arithmetic and playing the piano.

One night, Julien wakes up and discovers that Bonnet is wearing a kippah and is praying in Hebrew. After digging through his new friend's locker, Julien learns the truth. His new friend's name is not Bonnet, but Jean Kippelstein. Père Jean, a compassionate, sacrificing priest of the old school, had agreed to grant a secret asylum to hunted Jews. After a game of treasure hunt, however, Julien and Jean bond and a close friendship develops between them.

On a cold morning in January 1944, the Gestapo raid the school. As the students are lined up in the school courtyard, a Gestapo officer denounces the illegal nature of Père Jean's actions. He further accuses all French people of being weak and undisciplined. Meanwhile, Père Jean and the three Jewish students are led away by the officers. Père Jean shouts: *"Au revoir, les enfants! À bientôt!"* to the children and they respond: *"Au revoir, mon père!"* As they leave the grounds, Jean glances over towards Julien briefly, and he waves in return.

The film ends with an older Julien looking back upon that event

**Some Thoughts...“Busting Mythologies”**

**Let's Give**

**Doxology**

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
praise him, all creatures here below,  
praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

## **Prayer of Dedication**

### **The Christmas Bowl and Prayers of the People**

([https://www.actforpeace.org.au/www\\_AFP/media/Christmas-Bowl/CB19-Resources/CB19-01-ChristTheKingSunday.mp4](https://www.actforpeace.org.au/www_AFP/media/Christmas-Bowl/CB19-Resources/CB19-01-ChristTheKingSunday.mp4))

Before the prayers we watch a clip from Act for Peace as we consider our giving for the Christmas Bowl of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) After this we shall offer prayers. At the end of each prayer/petition with the words, ***Lord Christ, hear our prayers*** we say, ***“May we turn the world right-way-up”***

**Hymn: “O what a gift” (TiS 278, Canticle of the Gift, Pat Uhl)**

### **Blessing and Sending Out**

The blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit  
Be upon you and remain with you always

Our service has ended.  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

***In the name of Christ***

**We sing twice: Shalom to you (TiS 778, Somos del Señor, Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)**

**Musical Postlude                      Organist:**





Christ Pantocrator: An Orthodox Icon of Christ Ruler of the Universe