

Those of you who were here last week will remember that it was Christ the King Sunday

The collect/special prayer for the day summed up the theme

“Eternal Father, whose Son Jesus Christ **ascended to the throne of heaven** that he might **rule over all things as Lord and King**:

The collect went on to pray that the whole created order will be brought to **worship at his feet**.

That is the faith of the Church.

But 'Look out of the window' say the sceptics.

'If you think Jesus is already installed as king of the world, why is the world still such a mess?'

It's a fair question.

How **can** anyone reconcile Jesus ruling over all things as Lord and King with continual news of wars and famine around the world – with the destruction of the environment that we're only just waking up to? How **can** anyone reconcile Jesus ruling over all things with our own struggles?

Of course this question isn't new

It's been there right from the beginning of the Christian church

Paul was well aware of it when he wrote his letter to the Romans

The Christians he wrote to were a small minority, Making their apparently crazy claim about Jesus from a position of great weakness and vulnerability.

They were seen as a threat to the established order, and so they attracted criticism, threats, punishment and even death.

To all appearances Caesar was king and not Jesus.

So they could see that Jesus **ascending to the throne of heaven** was only the beginning of something new,

His **rule over all things as Lord and King** had certainly begun

but none of the early Christians supposed it had been fully accomplished yet.

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And that helps us to understand Paul when he tells the Romans:

“wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed

On the face of it that's a very strange thing to say

Paul, above all New Testament writers rejoices, over and over again, in the salvation that we **already have**.

He never tires of spelling out what God has **already done for us**

Just one example – from earlier in his letter to the Romans:  
Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.<sup>1</sup>

Notice how he stresses actions completed in the past  
we **have been justified** through faith  
we **have gained** access by faith

And he's totally confident of the salvation that we now have  
We **have** peace with God.

So how can he say “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed”

In what way is our salvation still in the future?

Paul answers that question a bit further on in the letter, where he writes

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.<sup>2</sup>

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So Paul and all the early Christians believed firmly in Christ the King but they were under no illusions that the job was complete

The present stage of the story is not the end.  
You've heard the phrase, 'It ain't over till the fat lady sings'.  
But in the Christian story it ain't over **till the Master returns**

Jesus' first followers were quite clear:  
Jesus will return.  
He will come again.  
He will reappear in power and glory,  
Visibly triumphing over all the forces of death, decay and destruction -  
the forces that enslave and devastate human lives and destroy the earth.

And it's that returning, that second coming, that we think of particularly on Advent Sunday.

Yes, we are happy for Advent to begin the countdown to Christmas –  
Jesus first coming  
But for the completion of the Christmas story we look forward to Jesus coming again.

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Lose this and you lose everything.

Without the second coming, following Jesus is reduced to a private spirituality.  
a personal hope,  
but with no prospect at all of a world put right by Jesus as its rightful Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:1-2

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:22-24

This putting right  
(the biblical word for it is 'justice')  
is the sort of sigh-of-relief event that the whole world longs for most deeply.

All sorts of things are out of joint, both on a large and a small scale;  
How we pray that God the creator would put them straight.

All sorts of things are still going wrong, corrupting the lives of human beings and the  
larger life of the environment, the planet itself;  
How we pray that God would put them right.

All sorts of things are still wrong with us;  
How we pray that Jesus would put us right as well.

It might be painful, but it's what we need.

Believing he will do it is part of Christian humility.  
Waiting for it is part of Christian patience:

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The Christian hope for the second coming of Jesus draws together all the Old  
Testament promises of the whole creation singing with delight when Israel's God  
comes to 'judge' the world.<sup>3</sup>

We love the idea of 'the creation singing with delight'  
But we may be uncomfortable with the idea of judgement

But 'Judgment' in this sense is like the 'judgment' given when a poor widow finally  
has her case heard,  
the bullies who have been oppressing her are convicted,  
and she is vindicated.

'Judgment' is what happens when someone who has been robbed of home and  
dignity and livelihood has everything restored.

'Judgment' is what happens when a forest that has been damaged through logging  
and acid rain is replanted,  
and the source of pollution identified and stopped.

The world is out of joint, and God's 'judgment' will perform a great act of new creation  
through which it will be restored to the way God always intended it to be.  
With Jesus at the middle of it,  
administering God's just, wise and healing rule.

That is what his 'coming' and his 'judgment' will mean.

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There are arrogant ways of thinking and speaking about the second coming  
as though when Jesus returns, we, his people, will be able to put our noses in the air  
and look down smugly on everyone else.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalms 96; 98

A moment's thought will show how silly this would be.

Think back over the last few days.

Suppose Jesus had been there, physically present beside you, throughout that time.

Would you have been happy to have him see what you did?

Hear what you said?

Know what you thought?

When he comes, as the New Testament insists, he will bring to light all the hidden things that are now in darkness and expose the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

He comes, of course, as the one who died for us;  
there is no doubting his love.

But his love is the love that wants the very best for us and from us,  
not the sentimental kind that doesn't want to make a fuss and so refuses to confront  
the thing that's actually wrong.

He loves in the way a doctor or a surgeon loves,  
dealing powerfully and drastically with the cancer or the blocked artery.

How then should we live in the light of the second coming?

Jesus warns us to be on watch -

to be ready

Paul shows what this readiness looks like.

He lists behaviours that we should shun

But finishes with the positive: "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ"

Live in such a way that when people see you they see Jesus

Live now in a way that demonstrates your faith in Jesus as ruler over all things –  
as Lord and King

So on this Advent Sunday let's think of the second coming is with humility and  
patience.

But also with faith, hope and love.

'And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love'

That is our hope,

our longing,

our delight.

So I'm going to close with one of the oldest Christian prayers,  
so old that it's still recorded in the original language that Jesus and his disciple used.  
It's the second to last verse of the Bible,

Maranatha

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

1400 words