



Sunday, 24 November 2019 – Christ the King
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Jeremiah 23: 1-6 & Gospel of St Luke 23: 33-43
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Intrusive noise v eloquent silence

IT experts may say it's an impossibility but I find that when watching television, the second the adverts come on, the volume of the TV rises. If I'm right, probably marketing agents have realised that during the adverts people take the opportunity to put the kettle on or scroll through up a few emails and so, to capture our undivided attention, they need to blast out the sound! By contrast, the scene in the crucifixion is the complete reverse. Without embellishment Luke states "When they came to the place of The Skull, they crucified Jesus there, with the criminals, one on his right and the other on this left." We don't hear the screams as flesh is nailed to the cross. We don't smell the stench of the blood, as it pours out.

Purity facing mockery

Luke's description of the crucifixion is similarly clinical to his profession of physician. But, while Jesus begs his Father to forgive the crowd, Luke does not sanitise the crowd's reaction. Perhaps, like a television programme that we have recorded, we press the pause button so that we can capture the details scene by scene, we also need to slow the pace of the action surrounding the crucifixion to grasp fully all that is occurring. The soldiers make a game out of divvying up Jesus' clothing amongst them. The bystanders mock Jesus throwing his ministry and miracles back in his face. The soldiers too pick up the mockery. Whereas Jesus had declared only the night before, as he passed the cup of wine around his disciples saying "This is my blood", the soldiers offer him a travesty of a chalice with a sponge soaked in sour wine. They hail him king with a paltry stick for a sceptre, as they pass up the wine.

Ransomed by a King's pardon

Worse is to follow, one of the felons derides him. However, the other criminal, though sharing the same fate, realises as has no one else that the one on the cross between them is no ordinary man. This criminal has faced up to his own criminality. No diversion tactics, no excuses, he acknowledges his guilt and says to the other one "We're getting what we deserve but this man has done nothing wrong!" His honest grasp of the situation gives him an insight beyond anything anyone else has grasped at that moment: not Jesus' mother; not his disciples; not the Jews or the Roman soldiers who crucified him, only this criminal in sheer vulnerability recognises that Jesus comes from a sovereign state beyond this world. And, so he pleads, "Jesus remember me when you come into your Kingdom." Similar to the prodigal son returning to his father, Jesus, with his pinioned, outstretched arms, shows both his divine nature and his kingship, for he grants the criminal a full pardon. It's not deferred, not conditional but instantaneous: "Today, you will be with me in paradise." Only a sovereign can grant such a king's pardon. Jesus grants him his pardon in this world enabling him to live in the freedom of sins forgiven in his heavenly kingdom.

Redemptive love rooted in our life and times

One criminal rejected Christ; one criminal responded to Christ, of whom Jeremiah prophesied. In the reading, though we heard Jeremiah directing his comments at the Jewish religious leaders, his comments hold true for church ministers in every generation that we must not make a travesty of shepherding God's flock in faith. The unnamed criminal has responded to the one Jeremiah prophesies about: a leader who will spring up and reign as King exercising not only wise justice but righteousness: this king will redeem his people and it is by his righteousness that he will be known. It is that righteousness which the criminal recognises and so responds. The mercy Christ extends is not made grandiloquently from a glittering lofty throne but rather with his arms outstretched to embrace all humanity from a cross that is firmly planted in the ground, where all can reach him. There is no agony that we experience in life that Christ has not first experienced: homelessness, hunger, poverty, bereavement, desertion, pain. And, as the criminal beside him found out, there is no circumstance in our lives that puts us beyond Christ's redemptive love.

Respond or reject?

In this kingdom season, in the knowledge of the resurrection, we too are offered a choice: to respond or reject. Whether we have been following Christ for a life time or a brief time the words of the recessional hymn give us an opportunity to offer our commitment or recommitment, that at the name of Jesus we can bow our knees and, in our hearts, enthrone him and confess him King of glory now.

Amen