

Christ the King

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

As a child I really enjoyed King Arthur stories — from the ladybird book retellings as I was learning to read, to Rosemary Sutcliff's marvellous accounts for young readers. As an adult I read Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, as well as Chretien de Troyes's and Wolfram von Eschenbach's accounts of Perceval and the Grail Legend. Among many mythological elements in the Arthur legends one thing stands out — the idea that this ideally chivalrous king would one day return to save Britain and restore her to her glory.

It is not hard to see where such ideas come from: they are born out of hopes for peace and prosperity, they are present in other mythological writings, but of course they are there foremost in the Biblical teaching about Christ's return.

At the time of Jeremiah, Israel had been faithless and the land divided into factions, with the threat of invasion imminent. But Jeremiah speaks God's sure hope to troubled people — in verse 5 of the passage he promises a king like David will come and reign wisely, and do what is just and right in the land... and he will be called 'the Lord is our righteousness', or — a different translation — 'the Lord is our vindication'. This kingship is not simply about leadership skills, or governance. This is a spiritual leadership — a leader who puts God first, for himself and for his people, and who lives that with integrity. Jeremiah foresees Jesus's reign with great clarity and great hope in dark times.

The reading in Luke's gospel is perhaps a surprise so close to Christmas. Are we not on the verge of Advent, rather than speaking of Good Friday? And yet the theme of Jesus claims his kingship definitively on the cross:

- he is given a crown — but of thorns
- he is 'exalted' or lifted up on the cross — which becomes his throne
- to the cross is nailed 'this is the king of the Jews'
- the criminal says, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'.

It is an extraordinary ascension to the throne, and it calls into question our understanding of what kingly glory might be. But the cross and the resurrection provide the definitive claim of Jesus's messiahship, his definitive claim on us, and the cause for us to expect Jesus, the dead but risen king to return. Hallelujah!

Blessings,

Tim.