

'The Cross stands while the earth revolves' – A Homily for Christ the King

Jeremiah 23.1-6

Psalms 46

Colossians 1.11-20

Luke 23.33-43

I must admit, I'm not really enjoying the Crown season five. The interest and mystique of a young monarch trying to find her place in the world of politics in which 'the crown must always win,' that was there in the first few seasons has given way to the tabloid triteness of the 90s. Now, fictitiously, a disgruntled Prince Charles wants his mother to abdicate so he can take her place and the Queen herself seems to do little but drink tea and watch television while wearing an array of cardigans. Hardly compulsive viewing.

Britain today is swirling with unresolved issues and crackling with uncertainties. Monarchy is very much on our mind with the recent death of our Queen and the accession of our new King, and questions of justice loom large as we enter the worst recession in recent memory. Rule and authority, power and politics, justice and equity are very much on the agenda.

For those who don't think religion and politics should mix, they might avoid reading the likes of the prophet Jeremiah. In our first reading today, he is passionately stirred up by the Spirit of God to speak in God's name against the rulers and governors of his day. Jeremiah speaks of kings and rulers in terms of shepherds, those who spent time out in the wild places with the flock, protecting and guiding, putting their own safety on the line in order for the most vulnerable to find themselves safe and secure. He speaks of justice and righteousness as twin virtues whose content cannot be simply decided upon by the whims of the day, but that rather reside in the eternal heart of God itself.

And Jeremiah is not pulling any punches. The shepherds who should be out with the flock protecting and guiding have been deliberately plotting against them, stoking division and scattering the community through self-interest and self-regard. The fiery judgement of God is coming upon such people, says the prophet, and more than this, their thoughtless

actions are provoking his action in the world. The time has come where God himself has had enough of human violence and greed and in which he himself will act, to gather up and heal where others have only come to scatter and to break down. In our society where a tiny minority become fat with the abundance of the land while others starve or freeze, I wonder where God is at work, I wonder where he is, crying out amongst the poor, the disabled and the disadvantaged, that they may fear no longer, nor be dismayed nor go missing.

It feels as if trouble is all around us. The reckless downpours of last week gave us the smallest taste of what the most vulnerable of our world are facing through the dangers of climate change, even as the rich nations of our world gather to discuss their fate and allocate ever diminishing funds for their support. Trickle-down economics continues to be exposed for the sham that it is as the divide between rich and poor becomes a chasm. And finally, the self-seeking politics of those in power implodes almost daily in political scandal and failures of vision. How can we say with the psalmist that 'we will not fear, though the earth be moved / and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea. / Though the waters thereof rage and swell and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same?

That little nation of Israel in the time of the prophets and the psalms knew what it meant to be naked and vulnerable in a world of economic and military giants. They were surrounded by tempest and storm, violence and rage as the wrath of the nations was visited upon them time and again. Things are very little today with rockets and bombs exploding on the innocent as the machines of war advance. But still they refused to give up hope, turning time and again to the God of the Exodus, the One who moves against the powerful and the tyrant, the One who turns slavery into freedom and the darkness of death into resurrection life.

It is when we turn to our third reading today, taken from the epistle to the Colossians that we begin to feel the full audacity of Christian hope. With poetic verve, Saint Paul speaks about the God who has decisively acted in Christ, breaking into the dark places of this world and disabling their power. Even as we are tempted to give up our world to those powers of injustice and untruth that threaten from every side, Saint Paul makes the

bold claim that this world is not absent to God's purpose and promise, but is rather shaped and saved by it. Jesus will not fit into the secular structures of this world, he does not travel from afar in order to fix something that has gone wrong, no, from the beginning and the end he is the shape and destiny of the whole of creation. Not just the hope of you and me, but the hope of the entire cosmos itself.

This is how one theologian puts it, 'the words 'all' and 'everything' run like a chorus through the text. Paul, lying in his prison cell meditating upon Jesus and his relationship to this universe, has come to realise that everything in this world was made for the sake of Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus Christ was not a footnote in God's history book; he was not an afterthought in the mind of God. Jesus Christ is the first thing in the mind of God. So no matter what else exists or whatever has existed or ever will exist, it exists for the sake of Jesus Christ.' This means that finally our world will not be given over to futility or emptiness or absurdity, even death, but that Christ will soon be all in all, drawing everything into his compassionate and healing embrace.

But perhaps, just as we think everything is beginning to make sense, we are hit square in the face by today's Gospel in which Christ is dragged onto the cross and crucified between two thieves as a common criminal, naked and alone. One of the thieves verbally abuses him, but the other says something very strange indeed: "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." Perhaps this simple criminal has come to see what we all need ultimately to see, that it is only from the Cross of Christ that we can see the truth of things. The Cross stands and the earth revolves, and with his arms outstretched the King of the universe begins to rule.