

Reading: John 18:33-37

Loving Jesus you show a new kind of king.
Help us to learn from your example. Amen

It's really lovely to be baptising Lucy today and welcoming her into the family of God. Many of us remember Shirley Rhodes with great affection and Lucy is Shirley's great granddaughter. She also has the second name of, you guessed it, Shirley. Her parents Lisa and William are so lucky to have a baby girl. Boys are fine too. I was one myself but little girls like to dress up as princesses. A really great time for us was taking our girls to Disneyland and buying them princess dresses which they wore as we explored the happy kingdom. What made it even happier for us was the man at the hotel thought NZ dollars are the same as American dollars. I'd give you his name but somehow I don't think he will be working for them anymore.

The kingdom Jesus finds himself in is not a happy kingdom. Many want to proclaim him king. Outraged by this and unable to put him to death themselves the Jewish authorities send Jesus to Pilate.

Pilate is fascinated by him and wants to find out what sort of king he is. It turns out that Jesus is not a king like other kings. On this Christ the King Sunday we see his sort of kingship best in what follows after Pilate sent him to death. Even on the cross, most of all on the cross, Jesus shows the marks of his reign. He shows compassion, forgiveness and love.

Jesus asks God's forgiveness on those people who are crucifying him. "Father," he cries out, "forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Let's pause for a moment and think of what this means. Think of all Jesus has been through. He has been arrested, taken from his friends, spat on, whipped to an inch of his life, made to carry his own cross until he could no longer walk. Then he has had nails driven into his hands and feet, his clothes taken from him and his dignity, a crown of thorns thrust onto his head, then lifted with these nailed hands and feet as support, denied food or drink. He has been subjected to physical, emotional and spiritual suffering beyond our imagining and what is his response. Forgiveness. "Father forgive them," he prays.

Jesus our king is like no other because he is forgiveness. Jesus is a different kind of king he is a king who forgives. Jesus is the sort of king who shows compassion even to those that others regard as worthless.

The story goes of the vicar who was dying. In case you are offended by this a lawyer told me this story. The vicar asked that her lawyer sit on one side of her and her insurance broker on the other. Why are we here said the lawyer getting bored after an hour. "I wanted to die like Jesus with a criminal on one side and thief on the other!"

Any way Jesus shows compassion to the thief. He gives him the greatest gift there is to offer, eternal life. "Today," he tells the thief, "you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus is a new kind of king who shows compassion.

Jesus is new kind of king who shows love. I don't know about you but if I had to die on a cross the last thing on my mind would be other people. But Jesus' heart is broken when he sees his mother standing on her own at the foot of his cross. I am very sure her heart would have been breaking too. He calls to John, one of his disciples. To John he says, "Here is your mother." And to Mary he says, "Here is your son." A new family is begun that day. Mary with no widow's pension would have been taken care of. This is what love looks like. It is concerned for the other even when we are at our most vulnerable.

Jesus is new kind of king who really loves.

This is a different sort of kingship. It's not about commanding others or having great power, it's about drawing from the very heart of God, the heart of love.

Other kings ask us to die for them, for king and country. Jesus is a new kind of king because he asks to die for us.

In the world of antiquity Jesus is unique but his forgiveness, compassion and love have profoundly affected the world through all history even the world of kings and queens.

Last week the Church remembered Elizabeth of Hungary. Elizabeth was born in 1207 and married Ludwig, the king of Hungary. She was no Disney princess. Elizabeth and her husband devoted themselves to helping the poor and her husband gave her huge sums to support her work. She funded hospitals and orphanages in particular. After 7 years of happy marriage Ludwig died and her grief was inconsolable. To make a bad situation worse her son was taken from her by her brother-in-law because the boy was the heir to the crown of Hungary. She was turned out of the royal castle and began begging for food. She became a Franciscan and was put under the oversight of a harsh inquisitor who made her life a living hell. The resulting poverty and hunger lead to her early death at 24. The last 4 years of her life she spent in spite of ill health caring for the poor and sick. She always had great charm and humour and was reported to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Although looking at her painting I think they should have gone to Specsavers. On her death the poor of the city came by the thousands to mourn her as one of their own. Her body thrown into a humble grave. Compassion, forgiveness, love were the marks of Elizabeth's life. She showed us a different sort of royalty, the nobility of life lived after the example of Jesus.

Like Lucy most of us aren't princesses or princes at all but through our baptisms we are members of the royal priesthood of believers. This royal priesthood has the same values as our king: forgiveness, compassion and love. These mark us out as followers of a new kind of king.

Let us pray...

Saviour hanging on the cross, you are a new king. You call your subjects friends. You wear a crown of thorns and make a cross your throne. To us you give new life and hope as we become your body and your church. May the forgiveness, love and compassion you give us so shape our lives that we live according to your gospel now and forever. Amen