

A different regime

Luke 23.33-43

Even on the cross Jesus invites controversy, being challenged to save himself – and his unfortunate companions – if he is the Messiah of God, or the King of the Jews, as the inscription declares. Jesus' only comment on the debate is to ask for God's forgiveness for his executors and to give assurance to the repentant criminal.

Now read Luke 23.33-43 see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

A month before we celebrate the coming of Jesus as a vulnerable baby, we recognise the kingship he laid aside to come among us and to die for us. We are invited to respond to his double sacrifice for us by turning to him, as did the second criminal, and acknowledging our need of his rule over us, whatever that may demand.



What costs or challenges do people face when a regime changes?

DESIGN

In trying to label Jesus, the Roman soldiers wrote 'King of the Jews' above him on the cross, sometimes depicted as INRI from the first letters of the Latin words. Design an inscription for Jesus that would, in a few words, describe his significance today, as we approach Christmas 2022. Display it in your window or on your church noticeboard, and ask for feedback on its impact.

Pray

The criminal crucified next to Jesus had presumably not lived by a high moral standard or in accordance with the current religious laws. Yet even he was able to see that Jesus was not only innocent of any crime but somehow on a higher plain altogether. At his last moment he repented, changed, was accepted into Paradise. Spend time offering to God those situations and individuals which you feel are beyond hope, asking him to bring about change, and being willing to be part of that change yourself.

LOOK

People who suffer from prosopagnosia are unable to recognise faces. Why did some people recognise who Jesus was, while others said he was a false messiah? Search online for pictures of European monarchs, many of whom engage with the public in an informal way with no outward sign of their role. Would you recognise them in the street? If not by their facial features, how might you recognise those in positions of authority?

CROWNS

The British coronation crown weighs 2.2kg and has over 400 jewels. Make crowns for all the family from card and decorate them, ranging from a simple circle to something quite ornate. When you put on your crown, does that make you a monarch? Jesus was not seen as a king on earth. But he came from his kingdom in heaven and invites us, like the criminal on the cross, to join him there. Does that change how you feel about praying 'your kingdom come'?

PLAY

Play a board game such as Monopoly™, Scrabble™ or Mexican Train™ with another household – do you have different rules? Which do you agree to use? Whose are better? Imagine driving in another country and using UK rules about driving on the left! After the game, discuss what you feel are the important rules that we live by in God's kingdom. How does it change the way you live, to be under God's rule, rather than making your own rules?

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

The Romans took Jesus to a hill known as 'The Skull' and lifted him up onto the cross to die. There were two more crosses, one to his left and one to his right. Two criminals hung there. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'

Roman soldiers played games of chance to see who would get Jesus' clothes when he was dead. People stood in silence and stared at the suffering men. Jesus heard the Jewish leaders laughing at him as he hung there, dying: 'He saved others. Let him save himself if he is the Messiah, God's chosen one!' To these men, Jesus was a joke.

And they weren't the only ones laughing. The soldiers offered Jesus sour wine. 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!' they sneered. And the cruel jokes weren't all spoken. Above Jesus there was a small sign, with 'This is the king of the Jews' written on it.

One of the criminals heard all the laughter and decided to join in: 'If you're God's chosen one, save yourself. And us too, while you're at it!'



The second criminal snapped back: 'What's wrong with you? Don't you fear God? We are here because we have committed a crime, but this man,' and he nodded towards Jesus, 'has done nothing wrong.' He turned his head and said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Luke 23.33-43

Did you know?

- The Jews had been waiting a long time for God's chosen one, but they didn't believe that this was Jesus. Similarly, Jesus talks a lot about kingdom, but for many people he was not the kind of king they were expecting.

Luke 23.33-43 (NRSV)

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'