

Coronation Sunday

St Mark's, Newnham

Luke 4: 16-21

Col1: 9-17

We live in a kingdom of Reigns; we live within a Realm.

The Coronation of King Charles III is the fifth coronation in the life of this Church, St. Mark's, Newnham. At our sister Church at Grantchester, the oldest part of the Church is said to date from the 12th century, when the Plantagenet Kings, including Richard the Lionheart reigned; and if we take the date from 1352 when Corpus Christi College became the Patron in the reign of Edward III, then King Charles III is approximately the 31st monarch that The Church of St Andrew and Mary, Grantchester has seen crowned.

So we live in a Kingdom of reigns - and the two Churches have seen it all between them.

Yesterday's Coronation was a spectacle. It was a surprisingly moving service, and perhaps took a lot of people by surprise because of that. Maybe people were expecting more of a celebration, like a wedding. It was a Christian service of intense spirituality and grace. It was all about the Monarch's relationship with God, the Church and State. For me, the most moving part was to see the King being disrobed down to his silk shirt and trousers, to then take on the mantle of Monarchy, being physically dressed by the Bishops of the Church. The King stood before the ceremonial throne in sudden, great humility: one small figure, oddly vulnerable for a moment, with a thousand years of history on his shoulders. It was a ceremony of dedication and service: The King comes to serve, not to be served.

It is easy, or perhaps tempting, to write the whole thing off as a manifestation of pageantry that plays to the peculiarly English affliction called nostalgia. We are good at nostalgia. The Scottish do melancholy, casting history in a minor key, with haunting songs of exile and homesickness for the Glens from far away across the briny sea, usually sung, as Billy Connolly colourfully once observed, whilst sitting comfortably in Pubs in Glasgow and Edinburgh - in Scotland. The Welsh just sing and write poetry, and the Irish have a party. (*Other outrageous national stereotypes are available on-line*)

But the English do nostalgia, so our Sunday evenings are full of cosy 1950s murders, where the baffled Police drive Wolseys, the frocks are fabulous, it is always sunny on the Vicarage lawn, and one game old lady solves the local unpleasantness over a slice of fruit cake. We might yearn for proper cricket trousers, punts and picnics on an uncrowded river, and BBC presenters speaking calmly to us through massive Bakerlite wirelesses. We succumb to nostalgia

because we buy the tempting idea that the world was safer then, settled then, secure then.

But in 1953 (the golden age for Nostalgia-land), when the late Queen was crowned, Stalin died and Krushchev became the leader of the Soviet Union; the Cold War became entrenched, and each side established its effective nuclear capability; Russia sent troops into East Berlin to quell unrest; and there was devastating flooding on the North Sea coasts. The country was intolerant of diversity; to be gay was illegal; divorce a scandal; capital punishment the sentence for murder; social mobility near non-existent; and our health care generations away from the effective diagnostics and treatments that we take for granted today - oh, and smoking was a care-free habit. So we should be careful really when we look back, as nostalgia is not all that it is cracked up to be.

Nostalgia is also dangerous. It is the catnip that Populists have used recently here and around the world to make people yearn for "*the land of lost content*": that somehow things were better "back then" (whenever "*back then*" was); and that by voting for them, and buying the myth, with a bit of some long overdue tough medicine for those who deserve it, we shall once again be great again, safe again, secure again, without all the compromises and irritations that get in the way of how happy we were "*back then*".

So you could say that even Nostalgia is not what it used to be.

The point is that the Coronation is not about nostalgia, despite the wonderful uniforms, the carriages and amazing titles of Gold Stick in waiting. The Coronation is a solemn act of constancy but also renewal, with our Christian faith at work at its heart and at all stages. It represents and affirms the great Elizabethan settlement between Church and State at work (the Elizabethan settlement arising when Grantchester Church was on its mere fourteenth monarch). As the Church of England's notes to the Coronation Service explain: The Kingdom of God is not a place but a way of being, a reign of justice, mercy and love, which Jesus came to bring.

Our twenty-first century United Kingdom under Charles our King is a very different country than when he watched his mother crowned the second Queen Elizabeth. And we are a great country, despite all that is wrong, broken, unfair, careless and heartless. We remain a country dedicated to the Rule of Law, as the Coronation oaths confirmed; we remain a country where there is freedom of speech such that we can choose to switch off Any Questions on Friday night because there is nothing remarkable about people broadcasting their opinions without fear of arrest or censure; we **do** think that integrity matters, however close we recently came to being overwhelmed by those who do not care for principles and rules; our institutions are **not** corrupt, despite their faults and shortcomings; and we **do** believe in tolerance, diversity and fairness - even though we are sometimes egregiously lacking in all three. People **are** held to account - even if it takes a very long time sometimes. We cannot be complacent, but we shouldn't beat ourselves up.

The Coronation is about continuity and renewal. The Coronation service is ancient and new. The Church is about continuity and renewal. We inherit, inhabit and we make anew. Sometimes our own Anglican Church is criticised because we don't change quickly enough; we can become frustrated because we don't provide easy answers to hard questions. But what we do achieve is continuity and renewal.

And that is our relationship with God - the continuous loving presence in our lives, even when we don't notice, or think we can do without, or fear we have been forgotten; and the constant renewal comes as we bring ourselves to God to seek forgiveness, to encounter God in fellowship as we do today, and Christian love, to support each other, and to remember, learn, reflect, pray, sing, and serve in all the unglamorous and quiet ways that we do.

And our relationship with God our King is that of the servant King - the King who died for us, for the forgiveness of our sins, the God who longs to serve us.

In this moment, where seamlessly we move from one reign to the next, we have found our Church right in the middle of this moment in our national life. The World has looked on, as the Church, **our Church**, has claimed our King for her own, in the name of the King of Kings. And this Church is everybody's church, whether a regular, occasional or a first-time visitor. It is for all of us.

And for us, how do we mark this time in history, this new reign in this realm of ours?

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians urges us to live our lives worthy of God, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit, becoming strong and growing in the knowledge of God, recognising the supremacy of God in all things, including over thrones and rulers. And in our reading from Luke's Gospel we hear again the touching account of Jesus searching through the scroll in the Temple to find the passage from Isaiah that speaks of the Spirit of the Lord being upon him, called to serve. So we take our place, we journey on, confident that in our earthly lives we also strive to live within another Kingdom, that realm of justice, mercy and love, which Jesus came to bring.

So, acknowledging our place in that, the greatest Kingdom, perhaps we too can, at this time in history, bring ourselves to renewal, We can, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, find in ourselves the willingness and resolve perhaps to say: I love you; I am sorry; forgive me; I forgive you.

We can perhaps find in ourselves the capacity to pick up the phone, to be the one to offer the olive branch; to find the courage to drop shoulders and surrender a grievance; we can find the energy and the resolve to keep going when we despair; to try again even though we feel we always fail; to stick with it even though everything screams give up; to serve even though we are tired; and to say to the world bravely that, despite everything, I believe in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Narthex we have the words engraved that Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow. That is the realm of Christ the King: uncompromising in love, unyielding in adversity, ever faithful in service.

This is our God - the servant King, and so, in the name of the King of Kings, we say: God save the King.

Amen

Rev'd Andrew Hurst

St Mark's Newnham, and St Andrew and St Mary, Grantchester