

We're funny about our heroes. We're impossible with our leaders. In a lifetime of trying to shake off hierarchies and oppressive class structures, we have held people of all stations to impossible standards. Our heroes are now mostly fictional; cartoon warriors and sports and entertainment celebrities. In recent generations, we've invented the 'reality TV star - supposedly ordinary people who do ridiculous things (for money and fame) that are not real at all. Such is the state of our understanding of heroism. Such is the leadership vacuum in our culture.

Governments are divisive and prone to favouritism. Churches are fractious and polarized by politics (and politics is polarized by religious argument). The empire systems of the British, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese (to name a few) left a residue of genocide and mis-trust throughout the globe, and within the "British Commonwealth" (do we even talk about that any more?) the Royal family remains, for many, a target of dissent, distrust and misunderstanding.

Now sure, no one is perfect - that's a fact - but over and over again, human attempts to forge something 'new and improved' out of 'the same old thing' serve only to separate us along sharp ideological boundaries that drift further and further apart.

What in the world is going on?

Well, you might argue that this *is* the new and improved version of the same old thing. History (should we care to pay attention) is not short of examples of our divisive behaviours. The Biblical account of the history of the small fragment of humanity is especially good and describing (and promoting) that divide. Not because that's what God wants (who can know the mind of God?) but because once we've declared ourselves to be God's people, we are on the lookout for those who don't meet our definition for inclusion - and God help those who don't, can't or won't pass the entrance exam.

Now the gospels go out of their way to describe the one who declared a different kind of kingdom was coming - indeed, was emerging all around us. Jesus demonstrates wisdom and mercy; courage and compassion. His debates with the powerful leave troubling questions for those who thought they understood the order of things. "The last shall be first...blessed are the meek...love your enemy..."; all of this 'Jesus talk' upsets the order that we are used to following. It prompts us (requires us?) to question our hero worship and wonder about our choice of leaders. The original disciples are alternately confused and delighted by their teacher; their mood seems to swing between "we've never seen anything like this..." to "can we sit on your left and right when you come into your glory?"

As the system comes apart, even the disciples imagine that the only way forward is to replace corrupt and godless rulers with people like them (who are on the right side of the one who has shown God to them).

But it's not meant to be like that.

Often, on the Sunday of Christ the King, we read triumphal verses about the reign of God - maybe something mysterious from John's gospel, just to make us feel powerfully spiritual - but today, Luke and the lectionary give us the crucifixion.

Jesus' friends are gone - afraid and denying. Power (in the form of Pilate) has been rendered powerless by the sheer weight of public fear turned to hatred. The crowds have shouted down Pilate's 'alternative sentence' (here, let him be flogged - he has done no wrong) with their own sentence. "Crucify him!" - the death sentence for a flawed ideology - which happens to mark the liberation of Creation...

Hear on the cross how it begins; two thieves, meeting justice (as it was) for their crimes. One defiant, one repentant, and Jesus reminding them (and us) that paradise is immanent. Tradition suggests that this repentant thief was named Dismas. And that he is welcomed into the divine presence. But the other thief is able to hear the invitation too - why do we assume that he is not included in the invitation? Well, because we can't imagine a

situation of real justice - real mercy and compassion - that would include even those we think are not worthy. But think on the words of Jesus - the activity of Jesus - the overarching message of the law, the prophets and the gospel - that reveal God yearning for the reconciliation of the whole creation. It is this that Christ rules as king.

If Christ is king, both thieves find themselves bathed by the glory of God on that fateful day. If Christ is king, our heroes ought to be those who cry out for justice - those who make the comfortable and powerful cringe when they approach. If Christ is king - as our creeds so boldly declare - then this humble meal makes us each members of the royal court; serving others, seeking justice, facing the powerful in humble certainty, fearing nothing.

The work is too much for any one of us. It is too much for all of us together. But because we are invited to a partnership - empowered by the Spirit to join with Christ in the work of God - nothing is too complicated; nothing can overwhelm this partnership. Count on it.