What power looks like **Feast of Christ the King (23 November) 2025**
Jeremiah 23:1-6, Colossians 1:11-20, Luke 23:33-43 **Waiapu Cathedral**

As some of us realise, we're getting to the end of the liturgical year. If you're new to church, today is when we celebrate the reign of Christ, when we look consciously at how Christ is God, and how Christ is king. I've wondered sometimes, though, whether the language of "King" still works for us today. What does celebrating the kingship of Christ mean when we live in a constitutional monarchy, with a sovereign who lives on the other side of the world, and who has little, if any, real power? Or do we think instead of other authority figures – presidents, maybe, or dictators – those who're more oriented to power and control? Which is another problem: why do so many people distrust power – and what does that mean for our worship of Christ the King?

This is one of those times when the insights of a Bishop who lived 16 centuries ago can really help us, because Augustine of Hippo has a bit to say about power in his *City of God*. He reminds us that God is the source of all power. Any power which exists in the world derives from God. It's not like we look at a human king and say to ourselves "God is like that, only greater" – the analogy actually works the other way around: God is ultimate power; every bit of human power is just a faint echo of it. So what does God's power actually look like?"

We catch a glimpse of this in the letter to the Colossians, don't we. Augustine reminds us that all power derives from God. Colossians shows us what that divine power looks like in Christ. Christ is the image of the invisible God. Through him all things in heaven and on earth were created, and in Christ all things hold together; through Christ God reconciled all things to Godself, making peace through the blood of the cross. This is about more than just earthly power – it's a cosmic kingship, bringing creation and humanity back together. The power of God is there to create, to sustain, and to redeem. This is power exercised on behalf of others, power used to give life and wholeness, to heal and to make new. This is what I want us to grasp today: if this is the God we follow, then surely we see this in our lives – so are we people who participate in reconciliation, peace-making and stewardship of creation? How do we use our power?

Divine power is power as it should be. But we know too well that power can be exercised in other ways: to dominate and oppress, to tear down and destroy. This is the negative side of power, and sadly we know what that looks like, what that feels like. It can be dangerous to those who hold it, and to those on the receiving end of it. Many of us are more familiar with that kind of power: we get bullied, or see someone else being bullied – and it hurts. Same with Jeremiah. He condemns corrupt leaders – bad shepherds – who scatter the flock. He's drawing on the ancient image of the king as shepherd. As shepherds care for their flocks so rulers should ensure the well-being of their people – only the kings of Jeremiah's time didn't do this. Jeremiah gives them a message from God: "you haven't attended to the flock, so God will attend to you, and raise up better leaders." Imagine how this felt for Jeremiah's audience. They hoped for a king who would deliver the people and gather them safely in, bringing healing and hope and new life. This is what Christ does for us, for all God's people. He's a shepherd who heals and restores. In a world where leaders often fail, where they perpetuate injustice, Christ's kingship calls us to trust in God's justice, and live as people of hope. Christ's power heals; ours should too.

Deleted: we're all too familiar with

What sort of a king is Jesus? Picture the scene at the cross: Luke shows us a crucified king on a splintered throne. One who's scoffed at by the religious leaders, mocked by soldiers of the occupying power, derided by the criminal on an adjoining cross. The soldiers yell at him, "if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him "this is the king of the Jews." From our vantage point we can appreciate the irony: Jesus was indeed a king, and it's through the cross that he comes into his kingdom – but if you're more used to the idea of kingship as exercising power over others this is strange.

It took the other criminal beside him to recognise this, the one who said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." We're looking here at a king who forgives, who doesn't condemn, but who grants salvation – healing – and welcomes someone who had done wrong into the kingdom. This is a king who isn't preoccupied with his own power. Jesus is challenged to save himself as a demonstration of his identity, but he does not do this. Perhaps this can serve as a reminder to us that anyone who seeks to impress others with their own power is ultimately actually quite weak. Above all we see in Jesus a king who's committed to solidarity with our suffering, a king who knows what it's like to be naked and vulnerable and oppressed by others. A king who will stand with us and give us hope and freedom. Christ's kingship isn't about crowns and palaces – it's about reconciliation and mercy.

What does this mean for us? Celebrating the feast of Christ the king isn't just a way of helping us mark the ending of the liturgical year. It's an opportunity for us to come to grips with what power is and how it can be used. Asking "what kind of a king is Jesus, and what kind of a kingdom does he have?" is one way of looking at today. Another way is to ask, "what kind of church should we be, and how does each of us exercise the power that we have?" For God is the source of all power, and how we react to the idea of Christ as king tells us something of our own attitudes to power: God's power, the power of secular authorities, and the power that we ourselves have. God's power creates, reconciles, and heals – not by force, but by love. What about us? Do we use our power to stand alongside those who suffer? Do we reach out to others, offering forgiveness, acceptance, and radical grace? In our workplaces, homes, and communities, how do we use the influence we have? To dominate or to heal? This week, let's find a situation where we can use influence to heal rather than trying to control. Perhaps those words addressed to Jesus from an adjoining cross can be ours as well, for they were spoken by someone who recognised his own sinfulness and yet sensed grounds for hope, for healing, and for welcome: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

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