



Gareth and I had our Covid-19 booster vaccinations the other week, and were very pleased to have the opportunity of getting the added protection they afford. Although this current booster programme seems to have had some difficulties, overall the whole vaccination effort, from the initial ‘invention’, research and development, manufacture and distribution has been a real triumph in this country. But not everyone sees it like that, and I have wondered why. I am sure some people’s vaccine scepticism stems from their mistrust of government and those in authority, and I realise that there are many people with good reason to mistrust, if one’s previous engagement with authority has proved it to be unhelpful, or downright malign. Because my life experience has led me to expect the authorities to do their best for the people, it does not mean that everyone else in our society has the same expectation. Of course there are many countries in the world today where very few of their people would expect the authorities to be ‘on their side’, and in earlier times it would not have occurred to most of the population to look to their government for any sympathy or understanding.



In the ancient world, might was definitely right, and the people of first century Palestine certainly could not look to the occupying Roman government for anything like justice, much less understanding.

It is against this background that I want to view the period in the church year in which we find ourselves today - what has become known over recent years as ‘the Kingdom Season’ – the period from All Saints’ Day to Advent Sunday, with the Feast of Christ the King coming on the Sunday before Advent. Beginning with All Saints and All Souls, and including Remembrance Sunday, and coming as autumn deepens and the days grow ever shorter, it is a season for reflection, a time to work out where our true priorities lie.

The gospel readings chosen for this time often have a clear ‘kingdom’ dimension to them, and that is quite clearly the case today, in which Jesus tells his hearers that the kingdom of God has come near. But notice this announcement comes immediately after John (the Baptist) was arrested.



The arrest of John is a clear exercise of what was then recognised as natural, earthly kingly power – John, an outspoken critic of the ruling house, ever fearful for its own security, is taken out of circulation, so reducing the threat he might have posed. John had preached a message of repentance, but the royal household did not want to hear this message – they knew they had plenty to hide – so they had him arrested. Jesus also preaches repentance, so is he likely to fall foul of the king as well, and what is this kingdom of which he speaks? Is Jesus an even greater threat than John to the earthly king? Is the kingdom of God an unconquerable power set to further undermine the king, one that, by conquest, will overthrow him and usurp the throne?

Then Jesus goes on to recruit some followers. We might think his cause would have been better served by recruiting trained insurrectionists, or people with political acumen, or at least people with the means to offer financial support to the cause – instead of which he chooses fishermen!



Simon and Andrew, James and John. About the only thing you can say in their favour is that they all shewed enthusiasm and immediately left their nets to follow Jesus.

But this is the point about the Kingdom of God – it is not like the states and kingdoms known on earth, both then and now, where rulers use force to exert their will and where everything operates on the basis of perceived self-interest. It is the sort of kingdom where enthusiastic fishermen are just the sort of folk needed to build it up – not, of course, because they are powerful and influential, which they are not, nor because they are, in all their innocence and ordinariness, other than flawed like the rest of us, but just because they are like the rest of us, painfully human, as the other things we know about them reveal, but, and perhaps this is their defining feature, prepared to give it a go.

They must have seen in Jesus something that caused them to forsake job security and go after him. Did they feel it to be true, what he had said, that the kingdom of God had, in him, come close? Did they see in him something of the glory of God to which they felt they had to respond? Did their souls yearn for a fullness of life that they felt themselves lacking and which, in him they saw a way of achieving? We don't know what they thought they were getting themselves into, and my guess is they didn't either, but they still went on and followed Jesus, and we know that following him proved to be very costly, but the fact that they stuck with it, and that we remember their names today, proves that in their following they did find whatever of promise made them respond in so wholehearted a way on that day of their call in Galilee.



As we look back on our own journeys of faith, whether they be long or short, we give thanks for those who have accompanied us on the way, those who have been our guides and teachers, those who have inspired us. We give thanks to God for the glimpses of his kingdom that we have seen, and we pray that we may stay the course and play our part in continuing the building up of that kingdom.

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