

**Feast of Christ the King**  
**Mthr Melanie Marshall**

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

I Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46

You don't vote for Kings.

So announces King Arthur (played by Graham Chapman) to a radical communist, played by Michael Palin, in the opening scene of a favourite childhood film, Monty Python and the Search for the Holy Grail. How little I imagined I would ever take succour from another great truth of that exchange: 'I'm 37. I'm not old.'

But more importantly, I learned: You don't vote for kings. Except, the Anglo-Saxon monarchy. And the Holy Roman emperor. And medieval Danish kings (or so Shakespeare seemed to believe). Our own monarch is only the person recognised as such by parliament. A popular movement could unseat them. The horror of living under an actual despot cannot be

overstated. Yet the most violent tyrants can be overthrown, and usually are.

If a king is someone to whom we delegate decision-making power on behalf of a whole commonwealth, his tenure dependent on a degree of popular will (howsoever expressed) but who can tyrannise minorities and whose power, while it lasts, may be exercised more or less arbitrarily – well, no wonder the ancient Romans didn't like Kings. Our sympathy is with Tacitus, not Nero; with Robespierre not Louis Seize. We accept our queen exactly to the extent that she is powerless. We wouldn't tolerate living in Saudi. Saddam couldn't happen here. Forgetting that these are regimes we, in all kinds of ways, support. But we don't vote for kings.

We vote for governments who launch illegal wars. Or, legal wars. If you've never voted in a government which launched a war, well, then you're not American. But if you are American, why vote? The ballot box goes down in the black part of town, and one candidate's brother will determine the outcome of the election. For

president there is this socially-privileged right-wing plutocrat, or this other socially-privileged right-wing plutocrat – as you choose. Oh, and no more trans people in the army. Because I say so.

We could vote to reform our voting systems. When 57.6% of voters at the last UK election didn't want this government, maybe we should. Or maybe we shouldn't. After all, 'Welfare' is a dirty word across the board. To be disguised, apologised for, or just dispensed with: because, no matter the colour of the rosette, we won't vote for it. Or, assume a stonking proportion of the popular vote. A parliamentary majority of 179 – 174, or even 66 – can be used for all kinds of things. To increase detention without trial. To limit trial by jury, freedom of speech, of association, of protest, of privacy. Only a minority didn't vote for you – they're probably those with something to hide. Why not arrest the guy in the 'Anti-Bush and Blair t-shirt', to be on the safe side.

Maybe we are still a million miles from Saudi. And maybe Saddam couldn't happen here. But if

a king is someone to whom we delegate decision-making power on behalf of a whole commonwealth, his tenure dependent on a degree of popular will (howsoever expressed) but who can tyrannise minorities and whose power, while it lasts, may be exercised more or less arbitrarily – then yes, we vote for kings.

Sometimes we take power back. Elected kings do what all kings do - promoting their partisans, protecting their business interests, giving the odd specious nod to the voting classes. So we show them who's really in charge. If we didn't vote for kings, then on June 23<sup>rd</sup> last year 51.9% of Britons need never have been induced to choose so spectacularly against their own interests. It's one example of many.

But choosing spectacularly against our own interests? It's what we do. Don't make that phonecall. Don't get involved with that man. I know the promotion comes with a lot more money but don't you think your marriage is already... Our choices are corrupt. Corrupted by our thorough ignorance of the good –other people's,

and no less our own. Vitiated by compulsions that arise from our sense of our own unmet needs.

So, we are blind, and we are hangry. And yet our opinion is now a way of life. I was woken on Friday morning by a text. Has Virat Kohli or M.S. Doni done more for Indian cricket? Text now to vote. Our parish trip to the opera – crazy. Who pays to listen to good singers when they could stay in and vote between bad ones? *Any Answers* was bad enough. Now, every programme wants ‘your views’. A video of Gregorian chant on Youtube comes complete with comments. ‘I could make love to this’. Just what those Cistercians had in mind. Thanks, Andromeda Zen.

Choice is great. I can choose cheap airlines. That exploit their staff. Someone pays. My choice is that it shouldn’t be me. But choice is great. I don’t want to live in Korea, or Zimbabwe. To vote according to Christian conscience is a privilege, and a solemn duty. But: no reader of the gospels can think that voting is the whole answer. Give us Barabbas. We have no king but Caesar.

We call a human being 'King' to confer authority on him. It's an expression of our own power, delegated. We – those who do - call Christ King to cede authority to one who has it of right. Not an expression of our power, but an admission, in the words of the old collect, that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves.

Ourselves. Note that in Matthew's judgement scene, the hungry and thirsty and naked and stranger are not someone else. **I** was hungry, says the Lord. Salvation, it seems, is for those with the stomach for radical identification. Or do we imagine we are the helper and another the helped? When it is we who must be helped, out of our blindness and selfishness, we, the rich, who are needy. We who are poor - in compassion. We starve ourselves by withstanding forgiveness, the free gift that, if we would receive it, would clothe us with dignity. Do we call them the needy? It is not the starving who are heading for damnation. It is we, who let them starve.

We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves. We think we do. We give human rights divine status, when they are only what another human may or may not decide to grant us. As they choose. Every human expression of power is arbitrary. Otherwise, there would be no hungry to feed.

Has Britain had enough of experts? I hope not, if we ever need surgery. Or if we ever need humanity. There is an expert. One who is uncorrupt. One who sees all, who knows all. Who is the reality which we, intermittently, choose to acknowledge. When the decision was taken to open the Skye ferry on a Sunday I saw a protester - probably a cousin – on the news. “Our maker knows what is good for us better than we do”, he said.

My friends, it's not Christ the President. Or Christ the Prime Minister. Or Christ the rotating head of the anarcho-syndicalist commune. Christ is king not for, or because of, our choices. Christ is king, triumphantly, in spite of our choices. Put not your trust in princes or in any human power.

It is not Tony Blair or George Bush or David  
Cameron or Teresa May who will have to stand  
before the Lord on that day. It is you.

Amen.