

Kingship is not what it used to be, it's gone out of fashion, it's seen as anachronistic, an outmoded form of rule no longer fit for purpose, but the Bible of course is full of it, including today's readings and we'd be missing a trick if we didn't at least try to understand it's importance or resonance for the people of its day: and it's useful to remember that kingship and kinship are related – the blood line matters precisely because it connects the king to his people and not to any other.

*'All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron. 'look' they said ' we are your own flesh and blood'*

And so David agrees to be both king of Judah and king of Israel – bringing the people back together as one nation but he does so by a pact, an agreement, a covenant made in the presence of the people and of the Lord. So his kingship is not of an arbitrary nature but is that of a servant of both God and God's people – a shepherd. What follows of course throughout the history of Israel is a constant battle between the desire of a king to rule for himself and the call to fulfil his duty to his people – and that whole litany of good and bad kings that then results – not unlike the parody we find in 1066 And All That. Christ is the being who puts an end to all this – the one good king able to fulfil that contract made in Hebron by David so long ago – and every other covenant made between God and humankind, and indeed, as Paul in the letter to the Colossians comes to understand, between God and all creation – a cosmic King who invalidates any other contract we might make with other powers and dominations, the worship that is of anything other in this world or the next. And he does this by sacrificing himself in the service of his people -most immediately the Jews, the people of Israel, but as Paul came to understand it was in fact for all people and if we reach back a little to a time when kingship still mattered, and Christ's kingship was still understood in these terms – a time albeit when knights and damsels were also common currency, we can see this kingship, this kinship, beautifully expressed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century words of the Ancren Riwle

*'a lady was there that was beset all about by her foes, and her land all destroyed, and she all poor within an earthen castle. A mighty king's love was however, fixed upon her with such boundless affection that he for her love sent his messengers... and baubles many and fair.... and help from his noble army to hold her castle....'*

But she will have none of it -even when he appears to her himself and

*'bid for to make her queen of all that he possessed... Yet so, through his gentleness, love so overmastered him that at last he said: 'Lady thou art attacked, and thy foes are so strong thou mayest nowise escape their hands, without succour of me, so that they may not do thee to shameful death. I will for love of thee take this fight upon me, and rid thee of those that seek thy death. I know forsooth that among them I shall take a death-wound, and I will do this heartily for to win thy heart. Now, then I beseech thee, for the love that I show thee, that thou love me after I die that death since thou wouldst not love me alive'. This king did all this: rid her from her foes and was himself grievously treated and at last slain... Would not this lady be of evil nature if she loved him not above all things after this'.*  
(pp388-390 James Morton text 1853)

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