

*“in him we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins”*

And we gain our freedom through his death on a cross, graphically illustrated by his forgiveness of a repentant sinner who gains his freedom that very day in paradise. Christ returns him to that very first state of innocence, of freedom from sin, of transparency, which our very first ancestors had before God – and indeed, as the hymn to the Colossians says, which all creation has and had in Christ. It’s a cosmic vision in which all things are at peace with their creator, operating as one, held in unity- not a static unity but one in which each part has a role to play in the dynamic of unity, a different role and often an opposing role which keeps the whole thing in being.

What I have in mind is a series of programmes which explore this necessary tension, a series beginning with Once Upon a Time in Iraq, and going on to Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland and Once Upon a time in Space – all exploring the very human emotions which underlie these necessary tensions and either make them work or make them fail. Just one example may suffice. In Once Upon a Time in Space the evident and legitimate pride and joy which the Russians have in their beloved Mir space station (Mir being Russian for Peace and not necessarily an ironic title) is mirrored by the evident and legitimate pride and joy which the Americans have in their beloved Space Shuttle. Circumstances bring the two programmes together but the legitimate and deeply moving emotions which the people of both programmes have become soured in the process. Cue entry of money and politics. So, as the International Space Station is promoted by one American as a force for good for all – what could be better than this example of international cooperation – one part, the power being provided by the Americans, and the propulsion by the Russians – making the Space Station inoperable without co-operation, at the very same time we hear the same American insisting that this remains an example of American leadership and economic power and the Russians are forced to abandon their beloved Mir – emotion trumped by efficiency. The point being that, when the Americans are forced to abandon the Space Shuttle, money again being the issue, and politics, they display the very same range of emotions as the Russians had, but both parties are blind to this fundamental unity. We see it in the faces of the cosmonauts and the astronauts who work in close proximity on both the Mir and the International Space Station but it’s not seen, or readily lost, by those on the ground where other forces are at work. The result perhaps, a war now in Ukraine – a chance of forgiveness lost.

So what has this got to do with a feast celebrating Christ as King? If we promote the cross as merely a victory over our enemies, as a means that is, of defining ourselves over and against others, as a means of salvation for us as opposed to them, Christ as Our King interpreted in terms of military or political or economic success but ignore it’s tragic quality, the suffering of a human being in all things like us but sin demonstrated by his ability and willingness to forgive even as he dies” *forgive them Lord for they do not know what they do*”, then, like the fall from grace of both the Americans and Russians in their respective space programmes we miss a golden opportunity for true peace, for the possession of paradise now- for that freedom which only forgiveness can bring.

*“Lord forgive us our sins as we forgive those of others”*

Or as Etty Hillesum came to realise

*“each of us must turn inward and destroy in himself all he thinks to destroy in others” (from An Interrupted Life).*