



ST HELIERS CHURCH
& COMMUNITY CENTRE

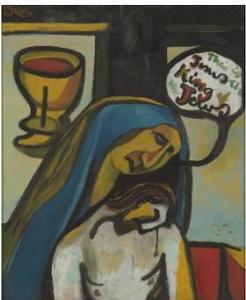
+ ◦ TAKEAWAY ◦ SUNDAY SERMON

What's in a name? by Jill Kayser

Sunday 20th November 2022



Today is designated in the lectionary as “**Christ the King Sunday**” and our New Testament lesson from the gospel of Matthew, paints a picture of a glorified Christ raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God on his throne of glory.



Matthew is also the writer who names the baby Jesus as the “King of the Jews” and this title reappears in the crucifixion story. The concept of Jesus as King was obviously important to Matthew.

However, the metaphor of king to describe Jesus is not used by the other Gospel writers or Paul in his epistles. One imagines Jesus would have balked at being associated with the commonly held expectations and ideas associated with Kingship and Empire, (the Greek translation of Kingdom).

And even for modern and post-modern audiences, the word “Kingdom” conjures up images of hierarchy and even misuse of power, because let's face it throughout history the tyrannical self-centred nasty kings far outnumber the benevolent ones.

However, the phrase “Kingdom of God” (or heaven in the case of Matthew) is key to the teachings of Jesus. This phrase appears 162 times in the New Testament. Jesus repeatedly announces the good news of the “the kingdom of God”. A kingdom that overturns the expectations of an audience living under Roman rule and empire.

The kings of the “kingdom of God” are NOT glorious in battle and all powerful; but humble and just.



These kings....

- throw banquets where everyone is invited.
- visit prisoners, welcome strangers and migrants offering them hospitality and shelter.
- heal the blind, the crippled and the sick.
- seek to serve rather than to be served.

These are the kings of “upside down kingdoms” – a term coined by author Donald Kraybill in his award winning book “The Upside-Down Kingdom - exploring the vision of Jesus”, where he states that “The kingdom of God” announced by Jesus was a new order of things that looked upside-down in the midst of first century Palestine under Roman rule.



Jesus’ kingdom of God” vision announces a radical and scandalous message: *The time has come! Rethink everything! A radically new kind of empire is available—the empire of God has arrived! . . . Open your minds and hearts like children to see things freshly in this new way, follow me and my words, and enter this new way of living.*

At every point, the essence of his kingdom teaching subverts the Roman Empire and promotes a “kingdom” vision expressed in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, where those who are despised by the world are valued and blessed by God. And those who humble themselves are exalted. And the least is greatest.



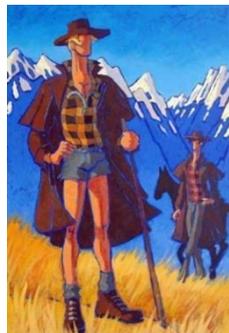
So maybe a more apt name for today would be “**Christ the Shepherd Sunday**”.

The Old Testament lesson for today focuses on God as the Great Shepherd, and this metaphor is also ascribed many times to Jesus by the Gospel writers.

Apparently, the term shepherd is used for God or Jesus over 500 times in Scripture. It was an image that was very meaningful for believers of both the old and New Testament times.

But what does this metaphor mean for us today in 21st century New Zealand?

I remember training Sunday School leaders in the Pacific Islands and being told that many Pacific children have never seen sheep, so describing Jesus as the good shepherd is meaningless for them.



And while we in Aotearoa New Zealand do have millions of sheep, I suspect we don't necessarily feel a real kinship with shepherds – certainly not ones in stubbies, gumboots and singlets!

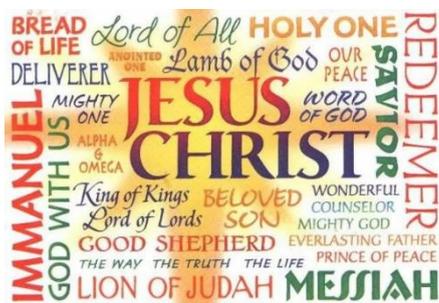
The name “good shepherd” is probably not that helpful to promoting the character of Jesus to our secular modern society.

There are over 300 names for God and Jesus in the Bible - each a revelation of the holy, sacred character of God that help us understand who and what God is.

We may find ourselves favouring one or a few at certain times in our life according to our needs and situations.

If we are hurting or scared we may call on God our Comforter. If we have sinned we may call on God our Redeemer. If we are sick we may pray to God our Healer. If we are spiritually hungry we may pray to the Bread of Life.

I remember attending a Presbytery retreat many years ago. The speaker was a Christian Counsellor who led us in an exercise to reflect on the name of Jesus. She gave us a list of names for Jesus and asked us to choose one that spoke to us that day. I chose “light of the world”. She then gave us big pieces of white paper and crayons and asked us to illustrate the name we had chosen. After this she asked us to stand on our illustration and bring to mind any concerns or thoughts and pray about these to the name of Jesus we had chosen. At the time I was having a difficult time relating to a work colleague and it was causing me quite a bit of stress and confusion. I asked Jesus “light of the world” to help me find clarity and a way forward. Suddenly the word “compassion” came to me loud and clear. There was no mistaking it! My response to my work colleague involved many emotions, but compassion was not one of them, but after that spiritual encounter with the light of the world, I realised that my colleague's behaviour was coming from her own sense of insecurity and ego and I tried to be more compassionate in my understanding of her.



Now I invite you to take a look at the image on the slide and see what name for Jesus speaks to you today. You may like to share with the person next to you why that name (or names) have meaning for you.

Names are important. You may have read in the weekly email that Paul and I have become grandparents for the second time with the birth of our second granddaughter

this week. Pip and Jesse her parents decided the names they shortlisted before her birth just didn't fit her once she arrived so they spent quite a few more days deliberating over a name that would honour their precious gift from God and have significance for their family.

Jesus reminds us frequently that when we pray in his name we will get results.

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:13-14) In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. (John 16:23-24)

And in Scripture we read of the power of praying in the name of Jesus: The devils were powerless because of his name (Luke 10:17); The demons were cast out in his name (Mark 16:17-18); Healing occurred in his name (Acts 3:6, 3:16, 4:10); Salvation comes in his name (Acts 4:12); We are to baptize in his name (Matt. 28:19); We are justified in his name (1 Cor. 6:11); Everything we do and say is done in his name (Col. 3:17).

When we pray in Jesus' name we identify with Jesus and ask him to identify with us and our situation or needs. We pray expectantly submitting to his will and trusting in his grace.

But what about those who don't know the name of Jesus? Or have no experience of Jesus at all?

In this situation it may be well to remember that while our names for God and Jesus are important and meaningful to us, for many it is only the actual experience of Jesus' love, grace and compassion that will have meaning.

In my Kids Friendly coach role for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand I used run training workshops for children's ministry leaders. I'd ask them to share a Sunday School lesson they could recall from their childhood. Inevitably no one could remember one, but when I asked them to remember someone who taught them Sunday School as a child there were many stories to share.

Interpretations on whether the "kingdom of God" has been instituted because of the appearance of Jesus Christ or whether it is yet to be instituted; abound. I am of the opinion, along with millions of followers of Jesus that this kingdom was embodied and demonstrated by Jesus in the past, and continues to be embodied and demonstrated today by us his followers in the present, and future. The kingdom of God is central to Jesus' teaching and is not just a concept but a reality that is both about what happened, is happening and will happen and that only those who follow him can hope to grasp the reality by entering it and helping to create it.

So, as followers of Jesus and citizens of the “upside down kingdom”, let's give thanks for the names that means so much to us and help us in our understanding of Jesus and God, and let us bear witness to those names emulating the character of Jesus the Christ and sharing His radical message of love and grace in our homes, workplaces and communities, so that we God's sons and daughters offer forgiveness, hope, healing, reconciliations, grace and love to **all the sheep of God's pasture!**

Let's be true followers of Jesus whatever name we give him – joining Him in the sacred work of bringing His kingdom to earth.

Then all will know The Lord is here, His spirit is with us!