

The Call of The King - God's Great Adventure

Video of King Charles II Proclamation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcFZ3KyZyUA>

A few months ago, the whole world stood still and watched the pomp and ceremony as King Charles was Proclaimed King of Great Britain. It was truly a remarkable event to witness. I show it to you now because it gives context to our scripture reading this morning.

Matthew 3:1-6

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." **3**

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

'Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.'"[a]

4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. **5** People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. **6** Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Matthew 4:17

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

This is the second Sunday of Advent. Advent traditionally marks the beginning of the church calendar. Advent in English means "the arrival of an important person or dignitary". So earlier this year we witnessed the *advent* of the reign of King Charles II. But for Christians the period just before we celebrate Christmas marks the arrival of the most important person ever! Jesus, The Son of God, The True King of Heaven and Earth.

The strange thing about approaching these recorded events is that they seem out of sequence. We pick up the story well after the birth of Jesus, not before. Here Jesus is a grown man about to step out of obscurity and into the public ministry and the inauguration of the Kingdom for which he was born.

But one of the themes of the advent of Christ is thinking about the whole of God's story - past, present and future. Just at the right time God arrived in our world *in the flesh*, in the person of Jesus. God has come to us to be with us and save us from our sins and be our king forever. And Christ will bring his kingdom to fullness when heaven and earth become one.

We have the arrival of The True King - Jesus. And upon his arrival we hear the Call of the King.

You might say, “So who’s this guy John, hanging out in the desert, eating insects, making his own clothes and scavenging for honey and lecturing people about God and dunking them in the river? He seems more like an outsider with God rather than someone on the inside with intimate knowledge of the Almighty.” But as we will see God is always more interested in the heart than outward appearances.

Who is this guy? What’s he up to? What’s the purpose of all this?

I find it helpful to think of the person and the work of John the Baptist as that of a herald, a curtain-raiser, and a prophet. He is like the herald of a new king, making a long anticipated public service announcement “At last the King is here, Long live the King”. He is like the curtain raiser at a major sporting event or concert. The short act that readies the crowd who have been invited to the main event.

John is also a prophet of Israel. And at this time Israel was experiencing a prophet drought. Israel, the chosen people of God yearned for the restoration of their nation under a great leader as it had been foretold. But God was silent. There was radio silence from heaven. Hundreds of years of silence! Had God deserted them? Had God left them in the spiritual wilderness. Left them for dead? There was nothing and one to speak on behalf of God. Until John. When God chose to speak a new message to his people. And what was that message?

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!” A message that is repeated by Jesus himself when he first arrives on the scene. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!”

So John camps out in the wilderness and people from all around are drawn to him and his message is essentially this: Get ready! Here he comes. Humble yourselves. Turn around and start following God again. Be honest with yourself and others. God wants you to have a fresh start, together.”

And that’s what happened. People paid attention, not only to the words but the place where he was speaking was significant. They must have thought, this guy is talking about real stuff. He’s calling us out of our spiritual desert just like he did our ancestors in the actual desert! They recalled to their minds and their imagination something they had almost forgotten. The river that John the Baptist was preaching from was no coincidence, this stage had a purpose. It was a sign to back up his message. After wandering around in the desert for forty years the Israelites crossed over that very river into the land God had promised them. God’s message through John spoke directly to their hearts. They connected what had happened in their history to what they were hearing. God in his faithfulness was about to do something monumentally important.

Let us journey back to the history of Israel... The descendants of Abraham, Issac and Jacob/Slavery in Egypt/Delivered under Moses leadership/wander in the desert 40 years/Under leadership of Joshua about to cross into the promised land. Joshua 3. Verse 5. Joshua told the

people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

We enter the story of God's people Israel...

The story goes that the priests shouldered the ark of the covenant, which contained the glory of God and his presence. The priests then led the people to the Jordan River. Now the Jordan river marked the boundary between desert and promised land. However, at that time the river was in flood. God says I'll stop the river flowing. Just keep walking and the whole nation can cross over. Imagine being the lead priest in that procession! The priest stop in the middle of the river and the entire nation files past. Sure enough they cross over on dry land. Not only did they all file through on dry ground but they each filed past the ark of the covenant, the tangible presence of God - had a close encounter with their God. They come up out of the Jordan river and then the waters start flowing again.

Listen to what Joshua said to them afterward,

Joshua chapter 4, from verse 23. For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God."

Stunning eh? You can see why the people of Jerusalem responded to the message of John the Baptist. They sensed God was doing something new.

God had laboured long for them, working away behind the scenes and had been preparing something totally extraordinary and heaven and earth changing. And now the time had come. The King was here and his kingdom was about to arrive. It was time to respond to God's great call.

This is a message that captured the hearts of the people who first heard it. They responded by confessing their sins and choosing to be baptised by John in the Jordan river. At last they were able to place themselves, reorientate themselves as active participants in God's great story of invitation and restoration.

What does it mean for us today? Where do we fit in this story? Where do you see yourself in God's Great story?

Firstly there's God's warm invitation. Come. You're welcome. You may think of yourself as outside of God's story. Maybe even outside of his love. I want to tell you this morning that you are so welcome. God has laboured long for you, God is so attentive to you, God takes pride in you and will always give his best for you. If that's you this morning... Do you need to accept God's invitation?

Secondly there's reorientation. Perhaps you feel like you are disorientated in your own kind of spiritual wilderness. Or that God is silent or absent and that deeply affects you and disheartens you. I want to tell you this morning that God wants to reorientate your life within God's life. And that is such

good news. The invitation is to turn from the wrong direction you are going, toward a life more real and solid and eternal than we could ever imagine.

And this reorientation is for everyone here. It doesn't matter if you've been a christian for 5 minutes or fifty years we are called again and again to this pattern of repentance or reorientation. Perhaps your experience of the christian life has become rather passive, where you don't feel like an active participant anymore or just grown weary with the worries and stresses of life. You might think "I'm not cut out for this, perhaps this is not for me." Let me tell you this is not an embarrassing thing for us because we all need to reorientate our hearts toward God. So it's a positive thing. I know it's hard for us selfish human beings but it's good news. Just like the people of Israel we so easily forget who we are and whose we are. But don't forget, it's the heart of your God you are turning to. Our eternal God and father and father. You are God's beloved child, wholly and dearly loved. And underneath are the everlasting arms.

Do you need to reorientate this morning? Is that your desire this morning?

Lastly there is restoration. God's mission is to restore his world in love. And we are invited to join God in this. This is God's Great Adventure!

There's a key line in here for us today. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is a two-fold action. It is a turning away from the wrong direction that leads into the spiritual wilderness, risking exposure and

death. But you can't expect people to turn from something that seems good to them without giving them a vision of a reality to turn towards.

God's reality is this great expansive adventure called the kingdom that has already begun, in the person of Jesus, has tracked across recorded history, is calling us into its work now, and will have its fullness realized when heaven and earth are united in eternity. That's the trajectory of the life this world is being called into. It is the life of God and the truth is that the life and kingdom of God will outgrow the world as we know it. And guess what? We're invited to collaborate with God in the greatest project ever undertaken - to love the world into the kingdom of God.

What ways are you being called to collaborate with God today? this week and beyond?

What next in your adventure with God?

Let's pray. Let's wait together before God.

Respond to God in the quiet.

Benediction:

People of God, Go and join God's great adventure...

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about

anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.