

Sermons at the Anglican Church in Luxembourg

Sermon title: To the Angel of the Church in Luxembourg write ..

Text: Revelation 1:4-8

I can't remember the last time I got a letter in the post

Not a bill, or a formal letter but one written with a pen or paper from friend or family – from someone who knows me well and who writes with thought and love and truth

In the first century ordinary churches like ours received letters from Jesus the King.

They came not written with a pen on paper but through the vision of a man called John as he found himself in prison on an island called Patmos

Each one from Jesus came from someone who knows each church well and who writes with thought and love and truth

They were written at a time of the Roman Empire when those whose earliest Creed was “Jesus is Lord” were being required to show loyalty to the Empire and Emperor by swearing that Caesar is Lord and cursing the name of Jesus

Revelation is a letter, a prophecy given by Jesus and recorded by John that is all about encouraging those who seek to live the complexity of knowing yourself to be in the world but not of the world

According to v1 it is a revelation of Jesus Christ to show his servants “what must soon take place ...”

This “soon” is about the “now” of the period between Jesus first coming – his life, death and resurrection - and his second coming

In Revelation the truth about the reality we experience – history, time and space – is interpreted for us from the vantage point of eternity, using highly pictorial and symbolic language to convey truth

And the truth it begins with is of the rule of God – Father, Spirit and Son - over the whole thing

READ v4b-5a

And very significantly, in the midst of this amazing language it is the earthly name for God the Son that is used, very deliberately – Jesus

Why?

Because He is the interface of heaven and earth, the coming of God into our public and private space: in his life, death and resurrection he is:

- “faithful witness...”
- “firstborn from the dead” and
- “ruler of the kings of the earth”

And in this trio of titles I believe we have our mandate to live as followers of Jesus very much in the world, in the public space

And in those titles is also our example of how that should be and the costliness it will sometimes involve

Firstly, **“faithful witness ...”**

By its very nature, to be a witness has a public dimension— a faithful witness is one who will simply say how it is, who points to reality – in the case of Jesus that reality is that truth is love rather than some cold dogmatic rightness

The grk word for witness is *marturio*, from which we get our English word martyr, pointing to the costly dimension of living for Jesus in the public space, but believing that He can use suffering, marginalization and even persecution in His good purposes

Then **“firstborn from the dead..”**

Our Easter hope – Jesus victorious over sin and death - is powerful to sustain those called to be faithful *marturio-s*

On the 24th March 1980 Archbishop Oscar Romero, was gunned down while celebrating Mass because of his stand for justice and social reform.

This year he was beatified in Rome, eloquent witness to the famous words of the Early Church Father Tertullian, in his C2 plea in Carthage: "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"

This is the freedom for which Christ has set us free: to be His followers in the world and to do so in the power of his love ... with all the risks and also the possibilities that that involves.

The third title is **“ruler of the kings of the earth ...”**

Rule, leadership and civil order are part of God’s good kingdom. They are uniquely revealed in Jesus Christ as Servant King whose signs of power are a bowl and a towel, and a cross.

It is this Kingship that we celebrate this Sunday in the church’s year

And again, it is with this security, this vision of Christ and with these attitudes that Christians are to live faith, when called to do so, in the public space

That public space takes many forms, as do the opportunities: like Jesus did, we need to understand the cultures in which we have been placed and the roles that we are in at any one time and the things that God is doing: when it is the time to stand up and stand out, and when it is time to yield and believe that power is made perfect in weakness and that in spite of our suffering in the short-term, ultimately His kingdom is coming His will one day will be done

“Woman, my time has not yet come..” (Jn 2:4)

“Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s.” (Mt 22:21)

“You would have no power over me were it not given to you from above (Jn 19:11)

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit..” (Lk 23:46)

In the chapter of Revelation that follows our reading Jesus writes individual letters to the “angel” of seven churches, speaking to their unique identity, the team spirit of each church

He speaks words of loving affirmation of their worth and also words of loving warning, a call to embody faithful witness, resurrection life and kingdom values in their life together and in the world

On Tuesday, as part of work of discerning the way forward for our church, our Council members pondered what it is that Jesus the King might say to us as a Church

Being reminded of “him who loves us and freed us” and who bids us ask ourselves how are we doing in our life of faithful witness, living out the resurrection and the values of the kingdom?

In other words: What is He calling us to be and to do in this place at this time?

Or to put it another way

What is Jesus already doing here?

How is He calling us, you and me, to join in?