

“If he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one, let him save himself. If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself! Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” If you are the Messiah, the chosen one, the king, then show us - so said the Roman leaders, the soldiers, and even the convicted criminal hanging beside Jesus. If you are the Christ, then now is the time to prove it. If not now, when? If not now, then surely you are a fraud and as defeated and powerless as you look. And the people stood by and watched as people so often do, not wanting to miss any unfolding drama no matter how gruesome. I am sure they wondered, too. I am sure they would have liked to have seen some spectacular proof that this was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the king of the Jews, God’s chosen. If you are the Messiah, then, where is the Gospel of Success?

Is there a familiar echo to that phrase? Do you remember when Jesus last heard such a request? Remember... back before Jesus’ public ministry, right after his baptism when he was filled and led by the Spirit... remember? “The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread... If you are the Son of God throw yourself down from here...” Remember? And Jesus said, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” And the devil departed from him until an opportune time (Luke 4:1-12).

Could there be a more opportune time than this? “If you are the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, the chosen one of God, the king of the Jews, then show us, save yourself, do something spectacular and prove it! The people are watching, the crowds are waiting, your disciples are sneaking a look from behind corners and bushes, now is the time, turn stones to bread, dive from the cross and let God’s angels bear you up. Give us a superhero successful ending to this story.” Isn’t it what we want? Don’t you wish Jesus had flexed his muscles and summoned up his super powers and descended from the cross and let loose on those who’d tortured and mocked him? Wouldn’t that be the way to show them and the curious crowd and the terrorised disciples and his grieving mother and us that he is indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the king? Don’t we still demand the spectacular and the super hero from Jesus? The Gospel of success lies deep in our psyche....

If you are the Christ, then stop the scourge of poverty and war; wipe out the evil people and rescue the weak; vindicate the victims and punish the perpetrators. If you are the Messiah, the chosen one of God, then show me a sign, turn a stone into bread, speak in a voice from on high, and give me some unambiguous direction and guidance. If you are the king of the Jews then take away this pain that eats me up, this hurt that will not stop, this mocking that I hear from within and without. If you are the Son of Man then show me, save yourself and then me and then the world will know, I will know that you are indeed the king. Like the leaders, the soldiers, the criminal, and the devil himself, we demand the spectacular as proof of a king, a king we want to define on our terms, a king we can be proud of, a winner not a loser, a superhero who makes winners of us, too.

But Jesus allowed no one but God to define his kingship. No one, not worldly leaders, not violent soldiers, not angry crowds, not sneering criminals, not well-meaning and not-so-well-meaning disciples, not the devil himself, can define Christ’s kingship for him. And Jesus said of his reign, “I have come to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives.” When even John the Baptist asked, “Are you the Messiah or are we to wait for another?” Jesus said, “Tell John what you see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the poor have good news brought to them.” He said to James and John this greatness, “The first shall be last and the last shall be first. I am among you as one who serves.” He said to the crowd that grumbles at his choice of hosts, he said of

himself and of his work, “The Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.” Jesus is the King, the Messiah, the chosen one of God, the Christ who does indeed save, not himself, but the lost, the condemned, the forgotten, and the ones he touches, eats with, and dies in between. And he saves them not with the spectacular, but with what the world deems insignificant and unremarkable. He saves with the almost inaudible... “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” He saves with the honouring of a simple request, not by satisfying the demand for the spectacular, but by the honouring of a simple, heart-felt request: “Remember me.” He saves with the granting of forgiveness, the assurance of presence and the promise to remember the ones so often utterly forgotten. Forgiveness, remembrance, communion: These are the marks of his reign... they are so anti-climactic, so mundane, so seemingly insignificant, so very unspectacular, so unsuccessful and yet, when they are offered by the God’s chosen one and offered in his name, they have the power to find and save the lost.

So perhaps instead of yearning for the spectacular, the Gospel of success, instead of hoping for a super hero, instead of demanding, “**If** you are the Son of Man, **if** you are the Messiah, **if** you are the Christ, **if** you are the chosen one of God”, perhaps we should simply and humbly ask, “Jesus, remember me.” Maybe then we will know that he is king because we have invited him to reign in our hearts knowing that we are forgiven, that we will never be forgotten, and that we are forever made sons and daughters with the one who came on God’s terms, not to save himself, but to save others, the Messiah, the Son of Man, God’s chosen one, Emmanuel, the one who was and **is** and **is** to come, Jesus, the King of the Jews, Christ our king. Amen.

Fr Robert Newton