

LIVE THE LIFE

"VIVA LA VIDA" –COLDPLAY

*I used to rule the world
Seas would rise when I gave the word
Now in the morning I sleep alone
Sweep the streets I used to own*

*I used to roll the dice
Feel the fear in my enemies eyes
Listen as the crowd would sing
"Now the old king is dead! Long live the King!"*

*One minute I held the key
Next the walls were closed on me
And I discovered that my castles stand
Upon pillars of salt and pillars of sand*

*I hear Jerusalem bells are ringing
Roman Cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can not explain
Once you know there was never, never an honest word
That was when I ruled the world*

*It was the wicked and wild wind
Blew down the doors to let me in
Shattered windows and the sound of drums
People could not believe what I'd become*

*Revolutionaries wait
For my head on a silver plate
Just a puppet on a lonely string
Oh who would ever want to be King?*

*I hear Jerusalem bells are ringing
Roman Cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can not explain
I know Saint Peter won't call my name
Never an honest word
And that was when I ruled the world*

*Hear Jerusalem bells are ringings
Roman Cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can not explain*

*I know Saint Peter will call my name
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world*

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VIVA LA VIDA

I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Coldplay's song, *Viva La Vida*, was number one on the Billboard charts this summer. Almost anywhere you went you heard this song.

I mention this song today, on the Sunday that the church calls "the Reign of Christ", because *Viva La Vida* is a song about kings and kingdoms. The song is the song of a king whose kingdom has failed. The song begins with the words,

*I used to rule the world
Seas would rise when I gave the word
Now in the morning I sleep alone
Sweep the streets I used to own.*

What this deposed king says, however, is very telling about the kingdoms and powers that are normal in the world that we live in.

"I used to roll the dice and feel the fear in my enemies eyes." "Never an honest word, that we when I ruled the world."

This king is bluntly honest about the corruption of power and its ultimate and inevitable failure.

*One minute I held the key
Next the walls were closed on me
And I discovered that my castles stand
Upon pillars of salt and pillars of sand...
People could not believe what I'd become.*

On this Sunday, the final Sunday of the Christian year, we acknowledge the Reign of Christ. The Sunday of the Reign of Christ, or Christ the King Sunday, as it is sometimes known, is celebrated on the final Sunday of the Christian year to remind us that Christ is King of the entire year and the Lord of all time.

Words like "King" and "Lord" make some people uncomfortable these days. For one thing these words don't sound very democratic. Over the past twenty years in fact, there has been something of a movement in Christian theology to remove words like this from the Christian vocabulary.

We are squeamish about the language of power in the church and for good reason. Throughout history we have seen such an abuse of power in the kingdoms of this world

and even within the church itself. Because of that we look for more egalitarian language, so that I have colleagues who will avoid talk of the kingdom of God and prefer to talk of the commonwealth of God.

The Sunday of the Reign of Christ is a day to celebrate the death of those old kingdoms with their abuse of power. Yes, in places they may still seem to rule the world. But they are *"castles stand upon pillars of salt and pillars of sand."* And those structures of corrupt power will ultimately be judged. As the king in the song says, *"I know St Peter won't call my name."*

Today is the day when we celebrate that the day of the reign of tyrants is over and that Christ is King. And the kingdom of Christ is entirely different kind of kingdom than the world has known.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WILL BE LIKE THIS ...

Over the past few weeks we have been reading from Matthew, chapter 25, which begins with Jesus saying, "The kingdom of heaven will be like this" Jesus says that the kingdom of God will be like a wedding banquet, and that we must therefore make ourselves ready, and not lose hope. Don't let the oil go out on your lamps as you wait. Jesus says that the kingdom of God will like entering into the joy of our master who has entrusted in this age with a few things. Jesus says that the kingdom of God will come when we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger, and visited the sick and those in prison. Because that is what the kingdom of God is all about.

In the kingdom of God, everyone gets to come into the party, that it everyone except it seems those who refuse to enter, because they are unprepared, because they have buried their treasure out of fear and those who refuse to share. Our God is a generous God and has given to each of us generously and our lives are meant to reflect that generosity.

Last Sunday I worshipped at the Cathedral Church of St Peter and St Paul in Washington, DC, or as it is known better, Washington's National Cathedral. It is the sixth largest cathedral in the world. It is a thing of beauty, built as an architectural act of worship. It was a fascinating place to worship. Right in the heart of Washington, DC. Talk about the kingdoms of this world!

Yet I was very impressed by this cathedral and its witness in that context and particularly by the sermon that I heard last week given by Dean Samuel T. Lloyd, III. The text for the sermon was last week's gospel, from Matthew 25, where Jesus tells the story of a landowner who entrusts his property to his servants and then asks for an accounting upon his return. Just think of the power of that text in a place like Washington DC.

Lloyd began his sermon by acknowledging all of the ambition that you find around Washington but he put that beside the kind of ambition that we find in Matthew 25.

After all, doesn't the message of the Parable of the Talents, coincide well with the message we are hearing from Wall Street and from Bay Street these days? "Do not sit on your wealth. Invest, invest, invest." These days those of us who had RRSPs and other investments tied to the stock market in one way or another are lamenting that we had not buried our investments in the ground. The servant who buried his master's treasure seems quite shrewd today to those who took a risk and have lost. It seems that no one expected these harsh times. Remember *Viva La Vida*: "One moment I held the key / next the walls were closed on me." "I knew that you were a harsh man," said the servant, "I was afraid so that I buried your talent in the ground."

But was that master really such a harsh man? When we go back to the beginning of that story he doesn't seem that harsh when he entrusts talents to his servants. A talent was, in fact, in those days a vast sum of money. It was something like a year's worth of wages, not for the servant, but for the master. We are talking about a great deal of wealth. We are talking about winning-the-lottery kind of money. He gave it to them to do the best that they can with. There is nothing at all mean or harsh about this master. He gives it to them extravagantly, generously and abundantly to see what they can do with it.

This is, of course, a story about us. Jesus is talking about a master who gives to his servants great abundance, more than we can ask or imagine, and asks only that we use them well and faithfully as the master would want them used.

Even as we live as we do today in an economy that is as uncertain and difficult as the one we are experiencing right now, we need to acknowledge that we live under the blessing of an abundant and generous God. Can you stop to think of all the blessings in your life? The gift of relationships, family, friends, mentors and guides, who have helped you along the way of life. Do you take account of the air that we breathe; the sunshine that falls on your face; the rain that nourishes the ground; the change of seasons; the beauty of the creation? These are things not things that we created. These are not things that we could have made for ourselves or planned. Yet these are things that come to us in abundance to bless us, to gift us, to enrich our lives. Riches pour down upon us.

What do we do with these riches that come to us? Jesus tells us to invest them for the sake of the kingdom. Not hoarded, not hidden away. They have not been given to us to be protected. Lloyd asked the question of whether we are ambitious enough.

ARE WE AMBITIOUS ENOUGH?

Christians have a word that describes this kind of holy ambition for the kingdom of God and for the right use of the resources that God has given to us. When we take God's gifts and use them not for the building of our own kingdoms, but for the Kingdom of God, that what Christians call "stewardship." The concept of stewardship reminds us that God gives us everything so generously so that as creative caretakers of all that we are given, our time, our talents and abilities, and our financial resources, we use them

and invest them to build a world where there is a place for everyone, where wrongs are being righted, where the weakest are supported, where our children are nurtured. We are called to be generous givers in the image of the generous God we worship.

Generosity requires discipline in a culture as selfish and self-absorbed as the one we live in. We don't follow a Lord who gave a tip to God when the offering plate was passed. We don't follow a God who gave a few hundred dollars or even a few thousand when the church really needed it. We don't follow a God who tithed, gave ten percent, even before taxes. We follow a Lord who gave it all. We are followers of Jesus who gave up his life on a cross that we might have life.

Are we ambitious enough to live our lives in the image of our generous God? Are we ambitious enough to live our lives in the hope that with God we really can make a difference? Here at St John's we are seeking to make such a difference.

BEING AMBITIOUS AT ST JOHN'S

I don't need to tell you that these are difficult financial times. But perhaps I do need to tell you that this is a time when our parish is facing some difficult decisions around our ability financially to do the kind of ministry that over time we have discerned God to be calling us to here in this place. Our parish council had a look at a first draft of a budget for 2009 this past week. Without any increases of expenditure and even with a 20% reduction in many areas of ministry, and without any increases in income to the parish, we would expect a deficit in excess of the one that was predicted for this year. We simply cannot do that.

Neither, do I believe, can we afford to make the kinds of cuts to our cherished programs that would be required in order to balance our budget. The kind of cuts that would be required would be a significant reduction in staff. I've spent some time this week with some of our youth ministry leaders and volunteers and I have to tell you that this is a very important area of ministry. Wednesday evening youth group, the Intermediate Choir, Sunday mornings: these are vital programs for our youth and these programs require staff. There is not another way to do this ministry and this ministry is vitally important.

Can you imagine coming to church and our youth just are not here (we couldn't afford a youth minister any more)? Can you imagine coming to church and it is time for the celebrant to give the greeting at the beginning of the Eucharist, "The Lord be with you," but instead there is silence, (we priest is laid-off this morning). Can you imagine that it is time for the Entrance Hymn, but we need to sing unaccompanied, because we could no longer afford a musician. Clearly, we can't do that.

We cannot run another large deficit and we cannot make massive cuts to staff. There is only one other alternative and happily that alternative is good news.

I say "happily good news", because in God's wonderful economy the church's need for financial resources at this time coincides perfectly with the need that each of us has to give. Isn't that wonderful?

Each of us, in gratitude and thankfulness to our generous God, in response to all that God has done for us in Christ, has a need to invest what we have been given in the things that God is doing around us.

Let me be very specific. Last week many of you will have received our annual stewardship package, which includes a narrative budget with several stories telling about the ministry that goes on around this place. In that package you will have received a pledge card. We are asking you to return that card to help us make plans for next year. I can't tell you how helpful that it is to us. We are asking you to increase your support as we look to next year. The first look at the budget projected a \$30,000 deficit. That would be a lot of money to cut from our budget. But here is some simple math. If 120 families increase their giving by just \$6 per week, we will have more than enough. If a number of you who are only starting to support the life of the church here at St John's, were to make your gift regularly, say through the preauthorised payment plan, even a small gift would add up through the year. I did a small calculation last spring that showed that if those who fairly regularly attend church, but do not regularly give, were to make that change, offerings to the parish would increase by about \$25,000. We would be well on the way.

To some of you that may seem like the same old story: the church is asking for money as usual, what is so new about that?

Well this morning we are here to celebrate that fact that old king is dead and to say long live the King. Who is the old king? When I listen to this song I like to think of that displaced king as Christendom: that is the old way we had of being the church with its power games and manipulation. That is one way I listen to that song. Another is to think of that displaced king as myself. My selfish concerns and ambitions. The old king is dead, long live the King.

King Jesus is on the throne and he calls us to new things: to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison. That would be good news. That would be a generous response to our generous God.

The title of the song, Viva La Vida, means "Live the life!" That is what we are called to do. We are not here just to talk about the Christian life. We are not here to play at being the church. We are here to be the church, to live the life to which we have been called.

May King Jesus rule in our hearts and in our lives, in our church and in our community as we seek to do the will of God in the God's coming kingdom.

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.