



3rd Sunday of Easter Civ
Excerpts from Acts 5, Revelation 5 & John 21

Loyalty

Good things happen when we give the risen Lord Jesus our loyalty
Fr David King – 1st May 2022

Please take some time with the Gospel before looking at this (John 21.1-19)

1. Duncan

Last year sometime the Cohen Brother's released their own film version of Macbeth, the Shakespeare play. And I went to see it in the cinema. It was all shot in black and white, with a very stripped back and stark set design, very evocative of the stage. It was very clever, and wonderfully atmospheric, with some great acting, the amazing Frances McDormand played Lady Macbeth, and Denzel Washington played Macbeth.

- If you know the play a little, you'll know that to begin with Macbeth is loyal to King Duncan. Macbeth and his friend Banquo are just returning from a battle which they have been fighting on the King's behalf. Macbeth is a loyal subject of the King. And ironically, if he'd have *stayed* loyal, then I'm sure all would have been well.
- But, as I'm sure you know, Macbeth, on his way back, is met by three witches, and they put thoughts of power and glory into Macbeth's head saying he will be king. These thoughts germinate and grow, and before you know it Macbeth has ditched his admirable loyalty, and replaced it with a full on plan to assassinate the King and steal all the power and the glory for himself.
 - And in the play you see him wrestle with this course of action. He knows it's not right. He knows he has no good reason to kill Duncan, who is a good king. But finally his ambition gets the better of him, and egged on by Lady Macbeth, he kills the king whilst the king is staying the night as a guest in his castle. A horrendous act of betrayal.
- And very predictably, this being a tragedy and all that, things don't turn out too well. In fact, that's a bit of understatement. Macbeth is crowned king, but very soon gets totally paranoid and starts trying to get rid of everyone who poses a threat to him, even people he was formerly friends with.
- At the end of the play he is forced to fight to defend his throne and looking around he realises that no one is with him. Everyone has deserted him, having seen him for who he is. In the end, in true Shakespeare manner, just about everyone dies, and Macbeth loses everything and everyone that is precious to him. It's a total and utter disaster. What a great play though! I do love a good tragedy!

2. Dawn

- Before we dive into the Gospel, do remember that with the resurrection a new dawn arrived, a new day. John even draws our attention to the fact that it was dawn in two of the resurrection appearances (including this one) as if to ram home the point.

- When the Father raised Jesus from the dead, he raised him as Lord of heaven and earth. “God raised Jesus as leader and Saviour” Peter says in the first reading. The rulers and powers that had usurped control of the world had been defeated; Jesus was now reigning as King. The world was under new management.
- Now, that point is so crucial. Firstly because it’s what this whole Easter thing is all about, but also because it helps to make sense of this strange and, let’s face it, slightly agonising conversation between Peter and Jesus later in the Gospel.
- What’s going on in this conversation? Well, the three declarations of love is definitely evocative of Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus, it’s almost as if Jesus is giving him the chance to make up for that. Yes, but there’s also something else going on. In asking Peter to declare his love for him, and then in discussing with him what this is going to entail (him being led to places that he’d probably rather not go etc.,) what really seems to be going on is that *Jesus is asking for Peter’s loyalty*.
 - Jesus is asking for Peter’s fidelity here, his allegiance. “Do you love me?!” And Jesus wants it, he really wants it. So much so that he has this huge long dialogue and to make sure Peter completely understands what this will mean and what it will entail.
- And the beautiful thing about all this is that, fast forward to our reading from the Acts of the Apostles (which was read before the Gospel, but is set after it) and Peter has clearly got the hang of it. When being questioned, he says “Obedience to God is more important than obedience to men”. The conversation he had with Jesus on the beach clearly impacted the rest of his life.
 - And utterly predictably, with this newfound loyalty, Peter is on fire. He’s preaching and teaching, healing people and living the life he was born for. Even though, in the end, it will cost him. Which is exactly the point. Real loyalty and allegiance only counts if you’re prepared to pay the ultimate price for whoever you’ve given your allegiance to.

3. David

- So, what does all this mean for us? Well, there’s such a simple message here, but one that I think is very profound. When we try to do things our way – like Peter going fishing – we will just fail. When we’re not being loyal subjects to King Jesus, when we’re just trying to force through our own agenda, we will just end up failing. The whole Macbeth story shows that dramatically too.
- But something happens when we re-order and re-shape our priorities around King Jesus. When we put that first, when we take our bearing from him, when we give Jesus our loyalty, our allegiance, then good things will happen, just like they did with Peter.
- But the challenge in all this is that loyalty is not a passive thing. True loyalty, real allegiance, is something you live. It means giving our whole selves to his mission, placing ourselves at his disposal, fighting battles on his behalf, speaking well of him to all and, crucially, it means reporting for duty, which is exactly what prayer is by the way. Prayer is exactly that, reporting for duty. If we’re not doing that, how can we call ourselves loyal subjects of the King?
- But there’s so much good news in this too. How different the world would be if we all lived, truly lived, our loyalty and allegiance to the risen King Jesus? If we spent time in prayer every day reporting for duty? That would be different world indeed, and a beautiful one.

Jesus, I acknowledge you as Lord and King. I give you my loyalty, for you to do with me what you will.