

20th November 2022 – Morning Service

Apprenticed to the King

Rev Alan Combes

Call to Worship

Come to worship Jesus Christ, the first and the last, the one who is, who was, and is to come; the one who rules justly; the faithful witness of God; the Good Shepherd who protects us; the true Vine upon which we grow in faith; Eternal Word, the Great I AM; Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace!

We come to worship Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords!

StF 57 – Let all the world in every corner sing

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King! | 2) Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!
The church with psalms must shout,
No door can keep them out;
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King! |
|---|--|

George Herbert

Prayers

Lord Jesus, You are the light of the world. Open our eyes through our worship here today, that we might see you both as mighty and eternal King but also as our friend - who welcomes us in to faith and friendship in him. Lord we humbly come to praise you; You who became poor; You who set aside your heavenly glory that we might see God in human form; You who lived to show us how to live; You who died that we might live forever. In our worship, help us to encourage one another as your church in the world

Collect for today

Eternal God, whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord and King: keep us - the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reflection - Serving God - begins with making space for God

It's the last Sunday in the Christian year - called Christ the King. So BEFORE we crash headlong into Christmas we pause to look at the theme of 'travelling with Jesus', of being his 'apprentice'. Like any good student we seek to look closely and to notice: what did Jesus do? How did Jesus do things? What was his manner and way of speaking with people? How did he keep himself going in his life and ministry?

I offer three Scripture passages that shed some light on this....

1. Jesus has been baptised, tempted, called his first disciples and healed many - what does he then do?
Mark 1:35 - In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.
2. Jesus has been rejected at Nazareth, John Baptist has been murdered and Jesus has fed 5000 - what does he then do?
Mark 6:45-46 - Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.
3. Consistently through his ministry, Jesus took time to be with God.
Luke 5:16 & 6:12 - But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.

Some think that prayer has to be done a certain way or in a certain special place (e.g., church). In reality, we can pray anytime, anywhere. We can CHOOSE to invite God into our lives; into what we are doing and who we are; into our plans, hopes, worries; our past, present and future; the big things and the small... So however we do it, we follow Jesus' example to take time to simply BE with God.

Prayers of Confession

Lord Jesus, thank you for your presence with us on life's journey, for the great heritage of the church over 2000 years and for your Holy Spirit in action in us and the world. Forgive us that sometimes we forget that you walk with us in all our life and care for the details of our lives and relationships. Forgive us when we give you part of our lives but are perhaps afraid to give you all, for when we forget that you are our King. Forgive us Lord for those times when we stop talking to you and stop inviting you into our lives, when we stop hearing that knock at the door of our heart...

Gracious God, may we hear and know that Jesus your son died that our sins may be forgiven. **Amen**

StF 52 – He is exalted

He is exalted, the King is exalted on high,
I will praise Him.

He is exalted, forever exalted
And I will praise His name.

He is the Lord,
Forever His truth shall reign.
Heaven and earth
Rejoice in His holy name.
He is exalted, the King is exalted on high.

Twila Paris © 1985 Straightway Music CCL No. 515642

Reading: Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Intro to reading

The book of Acts contains the stories of the early Church. In Acts 26, Paul is expanding the Church from Antioch to Rome. He's been on missionary journeys to Galatia and then to Macedonia. He's been imprisoned in Jerusalem and then again in Caesarea. Eventually he ends up on trial before Festus (Roman Procurator) and Agrippa (King), where he makes his case:

Reading: Acts 26: 1, 12-18, 22b-24, 28-29

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defence:

"On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

" 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

So I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defence. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." Then Agrippa says to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul replied, "Short time or long — I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

Sermon

We are thinking this morning about what it means to be apprenticed to the king. I wonder if there is anyone here who did an apprenticeship? Typically, on the job type training which involves the passing on of skills in a closely guided, one-to-one, style.

I have a copy of my grandfathers indenture: it's over 100 years old on beautiful paper in scholarly writing. It roughly says: "This indenture does apprentice John Combes on the 12th day of April, 1911, during which time he will faithfully Service his Master, keeping his commands and in all things will behave himself, and in return, the master will teach, instruct and provide sufficient meat, drink, lodging and other necessities."

In this document, John's life was signed away for five years – but note that the master also takes certain responsibilities to providing a living in return for the development of his skills, until John could potentially become a master himself.

Jewish culture has a similar model of learning: it is academic yet profoundly practical - focused on the application of knowledge and scripture to life in everyday situations. In Jesus' day, a rabbi would take on a student who would leave home and join the rabbi and spend typically three years, living, travelling, walking, listening, learning from the rabbi. Students were called Talmidim - which our bibles translate as disciple, or perhaps a more accurate word would be apprentice!

So we see that Jesus, as a rabbi - followed this apprenticeship model. He selected a group of disciples to follow him. He taught them for three years before commissioning them. He travelled, teaching in synagogues and homes. He was a master storyteller used to conveying deep truths for each new generation. He introduced new interpretations of the Torah, often using the phrase: "It has been said... but I tell you..."

But there was one major difference in his ministry that is central to us, our mission and identity as a church. Traditionally, only the best students approached a rabbi, who carefully considered each, questioning them and rejecting most in order to only train the best. Jesus turns this on its head. Jesus made disciples of all types of people. For example, Andrew, Peter, James and John were simple and uneducated fishermen and Matthew, as a tax collector was seen as traitor, an outsider, despised by the community. Jesus called the types of people who would've been rejected by any other rabbi.

Jesus' way is inclusive – unlike Alan Sugar's model of the apprentice; who says; "you're fired, you're not good enough, you're out - unless you trample over everyone else to get to the top!" Jesus chooses the weak to shame the strong. Jesus says you're in, if you're Jew or Gentile, you're in if you're on the margins of society, you're in, even if you've been bad. Jesus says to all - we can be his apprentices.

So I wonder, what does it mean to be apprenticed to Christ, to sign our lives over to him, to want to learn from him, and to trust him? What does this really mean for us today? Well, if we take a moment to re-read acts, 26: 12-29 we discover something very interesting... you see today's models of learning, don't particularly focus on the teacher, they focus on the topic and how best to transfer the knowledge and skills of the teacher to the pupil. But notice what Paul says, when he is brought before Agrippa to defend his position when he is on trial. He explains his new life, his new faith, but he does not say: listen to my message, learn from what I am telling you...

At the very end of his testimony, he says, these incredible words: "short time, or long, I pray to God that not only you, but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." Here is the key to apprenticeship. The key to all that is different and special about how we follow Christ and grow in the Christian faith. In the rabbinic model, Talmidim never set out just to learn from the rabbi, they set out to become like the rabbi. Their focus is on the teacher, on what the teacher is like, the way the teacher thinks and acts and speaks, their ways of dealing with people...

Imagine that! Imagine saying to a pupil, your task is not to learn from your teacher but to become like your teacher. And imagine for a minute, what this means when we become not the pupil, but the teacher. What does this say to us as Christians when we seek to share our faith with others, not just by what we say, but by who we are.

There is a Jewish saying that a good disciple should become dusty with the dust of the rabbi's feet. This means that we should follow Christ so closely, that the dust thrown up by his feet lands on ours!

Paul knew his audience. He knew that what he said before Agrippa would be understood. That he was actually saying – let Jesus be your rabbi. I believe this changes our whole view of Christ's words, when he said; "come and follow me". Christ – the rabbi – invites all, not just the best, but all - to become his apprentices. To give our lives over to him. And Jesus, the perfect Master signs an indenture, a Covenant in his blood – that he will in return, save us, love us, care for us and guide us in life. May we seek to walk in his steps that we might become like him. Amen

StF 181 – Of the Father's love begotten

- 1) Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.
- 2) By his word was all created;
He commanded and it was done;
Earth and sky and boundless ocean,
Universe of three in one,
All that sees the moon's soft radiance,
All that breathes beneath the sun,
Evermore and evermore.
- 3) This is he whom seers in old time
Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word;
Now he shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord,
Evermore and evermore.
- 4) O you heights of heaven, adore him;
Angel hosts, his praises sing;
All dominions, bow before him,
And extol our God and King;
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert sing,
Evermore and evermore!

Aurelius Clemens Prudentius translated by John Mason Neale & Henry Williams Baker

Intercessions

Lord and Father of all, as often as we try to separate ourselves from you, you run to meet us in all the joys, distress and complexities of our lives, and time and time again we fail to recognise you. Give us such a sense of all your mercies that our hearts may be filled with praise. Break the bread of our lives to your glory, as we carry the flickering candle of our faith into the sunshine blaze of your glory.

Lord, we yearn so deeply for an end to war in the world, breaking the bow and shattering the spear into splinters. Give us the courage so to disarm, knowing that in our very weakness lies our strength and the furthering of your kingdom.

L: King of glory, **R: May we build your kingdom.**

At the still centre of our turning world, may we simply rest and be, drawing strength from – and giving our energy to our immediate community. May we trust again the promise that all shall be made new in the bringing of the powers of this world to serve the purposes of God's greater peace.

L: King of glory, **R: May we build your kingdom.**

Lord, we pray for those who suffer, in body, mind or spirit. May they feel your presence with them in their pain, the reality of your strength and the refuge that you offer all who turn to you. And teach us to say little, simply to hold them in our love, and listen.

L: King of glory, **R: May we build your kingdom.**

Lord, look down on your Church as we stoop and try to build it up with worn-out tools. How long, O Lord, how long? In our weakness, may your Holy Spirit fill our whole being so that we may soar with the eagles as we work together to bring your kingdom alive here on earth.

L: King of glory, **R: May we build your kingdom.**

The who have inspired us and gone before us

Lord, we bring before you those who have run with perseverance the race marked out for them, and gone to their heavenly reward. May they rest in peace, and rise to share in Christ's glory.

L: King of glory, **R: May we build your kingdom. Amen.**

StF 56 – King of glory, King of peace

- 1) King of Glory, King of Peace, I will love thee;
And that love may never cease I will move thee.
Thou hast granted my request,
Thou hast heard me;
Thou didst note my working breast,
Thou hast spared me.
- 2) Wherefore with my utmost art I will sing thee,
And the cream of all my heart I will bring thee.
Though my sins against me cried, thou didst clear me, -
And alone, when they replied, thou didst hear me.
- 3) Seven whole days, not one in seven,
I will praise thee;
In my heart, though not in heaven,
I can raise thee.
Small it is, in this poor sort to enrol thee:
E'en eternity's too short to extol thee.

George Herbert

Blessing

God, you are everything to us, giving us life, filling us with love, setting us free from sin and guiding our way that we might live in you and for you. Accept the work of our hands this day, take our lives, give us your peace and renew us in the service of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.
Amen