

21st November 2021 – Morning Service

Christ the King

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship

Let all who seek God rejoice and be glad in him. Let those who love his salvation say evermore, "God is great".

StF 318 – Christ our king before creation

- 1) Christ our King before creation,
Life, before all life began,
Crowned in deep humiliation
By your partners in God's plan,
Make us humble in believing,
And, believing, bold to pray:
'Lord, forgive our self-deceiving,
Come and reign in us today!'
- 2) Lord of time and Lord of history,
Giving, when the world despairs,
Faith to wrestle with the mystery
Of a God who loves and cares,
Make us humble in believing,
And, believing, bold to pray:
'Lord, by grace beyond conceiving,
Come and reign in us today!'
- 3) Word that ends our long debating,
Life of God which sets us free,
Through your body recreating
Life as life is meant to be,
Make us humble in believing,
And, believing, bold to pray:
'Lord, in us your aim achieving,
Come and reign in us today!'

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Prayer of Adoration

You are the King of Glory, O Christ, you are the everlasting Son of the Father. We give you our love and offer you our lives. Come, Lord, and rule in our hearts, until your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Come, Christ our King, and reign over us, as you reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

King and judge of all, it is your will that justice should roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream. We confess our share in the human sin that leads to injustice and wickedness. We confess our pride and aggression, our covetousness and greed. We confess our intolerance and prejudice, our apathy and indolence. We confess our unkindness and meanness, our complacency and self-righteousness. We repent of all our sins and ask you to forgive us. Wondrously show your steadfast love and turn our hearts from sin to you that we may work for righteousness and justice and bring you glory and honour; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **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 CCL No. 515642

Reading: Colossians 1:9-20

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gracious God, we thank you for your overflowing love. You seek those who have gone astray, bind up the injured, and strengthen those who are weak. To bring lost sinners back to you, you gave your only Son, in whom all things were made. He came to proclaim a kingdom that was not of this world – your kingdom of justice, mercy and grace. He suffered and died, and you raised him to life, the firstborn of all creation, and the firstborn of the dead., offering to all new life in him. He is exalted and glorious in heaven, and to him you have given authority and glory, and everlasting dominion that shall never end. Through the life-giving Spirit you inspire and empower the Church to proclaim the kingdom and serve the world. We rejoice, gracious God, in your mighty acts, and give you our praise and thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

StF 362 – Meekness and majesty

- 1) Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
In perfect harmony, the Man who is God.
Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity,
Kneels in humility and washes our feet.
- 2) Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence,
Yet learns obedience to death on a cross.
Suffering to give us life,
Conquering through sacrifice,
And as they crucify prays: 'Father forgive'.
- Ch) *O what a mystery,
Meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship
For this is your God, this is your God.*
- 3) Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible,
Love indestructible in frailty appears.
Lord of infinity, stooping so tenderly,
Lifts our humanity to the heights of His throne.

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Reading: John 18:33-37

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Sermon - "Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God" Col. 1:15

Next Sunday is Advent Sunday. And on Advent Sunday we begin again to tell the story of the life and ministry of Jesus. Each year, we follow the story from one of the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke, in that Order, with parts of John's Gospel interspersed among them. This year we have been following the story according to Mark, and as from next Sunday we will be looking at the story as told in Luke's gospel.

So, if next Sunday is the start of the story, today must be the end of the story! Consequently, today is given a special title: "Christ the King". The story begins with the hope of the Messiah, and the fulfilment of God's purpose in the birth of the baby at Bethlehem. Today, then, we come to the climax of the story: the final revelation of God's kingdom seen in Jesus. Which is why today it is called "Christ the King"!

The passage from the letter to the Colossians which we heard read, is full of vivid references to the power and glory of the risen Christ. "He is the visible likeness of the invisible God". "Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place". "For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God," and so on.

And the prayer, which is part of the greeting to those to whom the letter is addressed, includes the words, "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power." Power and glory! That is what this great climax is all about! It's heady stuff, especially for those who are poor, oppressed, sick in mind or body, or burdened with grief or with guilt. Heady stuff for all who in any way are longing to be delivered from things that diminish the quality of their lives.

Artists, musicians and writers - across the ages - have been stirred by this image. Jesus has been depicted surrounded by greater pomp than any King or Emperor or president who has ever lived. This attempt to portray Christ in majesty may be seen in paintings by the great masters, in the Nash tapestry in Coventry cathedral, in the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's "Messiah" – "And he shall reign for ever and ever. King of kings and Lord of lords". And so we might go on. But what if they have got it wrong?

Yes, these great works do convey a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of holiness, the ‘otherness’ of God – and they have the capacity to move us deeply. But that being said, what if the portrait of the power and glory of the risen Christ is really starting at the wrong end? Starting at the wrong end because it asks what power and majesty and glory means on earth, and says, in effect, ‘well God must be like this, only much more so.’ Now that may sound alright on the face of it, but look again at what our text actually says: “Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God.”

If this is so, and if we can manage to put aside for a moment all ideas of earthly power and glory, the message should be clearer. The true nature, and so the power and glory, of God, is to be seen in the man who was born in a Bethlehem stable, who lived and taught in Galilee, and died on a cross outside Jerusalem. But all too many, whilst acknowledging this with their lips, find it hard to turn away from the idea of power and glory as it is understood on earth. On earth, the whole idea is to distance the important person concerned in every possible way from the common herd; to surround them with pomp and ceremony.

But the real question we should ask is not “What does power and glory mean on earth?”, but rather “What does power and glory mean in the kingdom of heaven?” And the contrast between our normal way of thinking, and the revelation of the divine nature is nowhere more starkly brought out than in the Gospel passage, which tells how the ministry of Jesus reached its climax.

Jesus is arrested, and brought before Pilate. Now Pilate is a politician. He is not interested in religion, and certainly not this odd religion practiced by the Jews. So, when he faces Jesus, and someone suggests that the reason the chief priests have handed him over is because he thinks he is a king, then he seizes on this. He doesn’t understand, and doesn’t want to understand, the ways in which the Jews organise their life, but he does know what kings are, what kingdoms are, and how they behave. And he knows that it’s his job to allow no such thing on his patch. So, he comes out with it: “Are you the king of the Jews?”

The answer that Jesus gives admits that he has a kingdom, but it does not derive its authority from human society – only from God. His kingdom does not come from this world, but it is for this world. The whole purpose of his ministry has been to open up the way of truth about the nature of God. But it is on the cross that Jesus reveals that the nature of God is to meet us where we are. He may be “invisible”, but he is not separated from us by pomp and ceremony. He is a God who is totally approachable. A God who is ever accessible, ever ready to hear. A God who understands us better than we understand ourselves. It is in the cross that we see the glory and it is here that we see the power. It has nothing to do with parades of strength. This is the power that is so often mistaken for weakness. It is the power of a love that leaves no one feeling threatened. A love that leaves no one feeling overlooked or ignored.

It is in love that is completely selfless, love so strong that it goes on loving in spite of all rejection, that we see the true nature of God. And that nature does not change. There is much that we cannot understand in this life, much about sadness and sorrow and pain and injustice; but hold on to the truth that it is love as we have seen it in Jesus Christ that reaches out to us each day we live. Love is the power, and love is the glory. And that is our faith.

Prayers of Intercession

Christ our King, keep us calm and faithful in all troubles; let us not be afraid, for you rule over all and your kingdom will come. Give strength and direction to all who seek to do your will, to all who strive for peace, all who work for righteousness. Guide all who proclaim your coming and your kingdom.

Christ our King, may we know that you are ever present in all life; you are there at the centre of power, where decisions are made; yet you are with the weak and the humble whom no-one notices. We pray for all who seek justice and maintain order, for all rulers and people in authority.

Christ, our King, rule in our hearts and in our homes. May love, peace, and forgiveness be known among us; may we seek to show we belong to you and you love us. We pray for broken homes and broken-hearted people, for all who have been deserted by loved ones.

Christ our King, give hope and vision to the suffering; let them be aware of your love and your kingdom. Keep, O Lord, in your grasp all who are losing their grip on life, and enfold in your love all who are fearful and anxious. We pray for the troubled in body, mind or spirit; we remember before you all who are ill, especially[Silence]

We give thanks that you are Lord of all, your kingdom cannot fail, death has no dominion over us. We give thanks that your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and our loved departed ones are with you in glory. We pray for our friends and loved ones who have departed this life, especially[Silence]

Lord, your kingdom come in us, as it is in heaven.

We bring all our prayers together as we say the prayer that Jesus gave us:

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.**

StF 255 – The Kingdom of God

- 1) The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.
- 2) The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair.
- 3) The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
Brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.
- 4) God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all!

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The Blessing

To him who sits upon the throne, to the One true God, be praise and glory, for ever and ever; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**