

26th November 2023 – Morning Service

Christ the King

Olwen Meller

Call to Worship

Today we celebrate the kingship of Christ. Jesus is a strange kind of king. He came not to dominate but to liberate, not to rule but to serve. We show loyalty to him, and help to spread his kingdom, by serving one another in love.

StF 347 – Crown him with many crowns

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| 1) Crown him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon his throne;
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns
All music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of him who died for thee,
And hail him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity. | 4) Crown him the Lord of peace,
Whose power a sceptre sways
From pole to pole, that wars may cease,
Absorbed in prayer and praise.
His reign shall know no end,
And round his pierced feet
Fair flowers of paradise extend
Their fragrance ever sweet. |
| 2) Crown him the Son of God,
Before the worlds began;
And ye, who tread where he has trod,
Crown him the Son of Man,
Who every grief has known
That wrings the human breast,
And takes and bears them for his own,
That all in him may rest. | 5) Crown him the Lord of love;
Behold his hands and side -
Rich wounds, yet visible above,
In beauty glorified.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou hast died for me;
Thy praise and glory shall not fail
Throughout eternity. |
| 3) Crown him the Lord of life,
Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
For those he came to save.
His glories now we sing,
Who died, and rose on high;
Who died, eternal life to bring,
And lives, that death may die. | |

Matthew Bridges & Godfrey Thring

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, King eternal, we come in worship to affirm that you are our God: ever present, all powerful, supreme. We give thanks that we are your people, encouraged, strengthened and saved. Thank you for always being with us, walking by our side, through the good times and the bad. We meet in worship with your people of faith. We come because God reunites us here, brothers and sisters in that family called love. In Christ, we celebrate your power at work. You raised him from the dead to rule with you for evermore. Enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we may see the hope to which Christ calls us, that we may be the hope for the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and the needy. We ask that you will open our eyes and teach us to see you in the face of those in need around us and act upon those needs. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

We confess to you, our King of Majesty and Justice, what we are. We are not the people we like others to think we are. We are afraid to admit, even to ourselves, what lies at the depth of our souls. We have failed in our calling to be your holy people; people set apart by hope for your purposes of justice and healing. We live more in apathy rather than hope. We are moved more by private ambition than by social justice. We dream more of privilege and benefits than of service and sacrifice. Reshape our hearts and lives for your Kingdom, that we can live and move and dream according to the hope to which you have called us. Forgive us, revive us and mould us in your image. **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.**

StF 185 – Sing we the King

1) Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King:

*Ch) Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

2) All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:

3) Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
Doubt shall not darken his witness within;
Hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King:

4) Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song your creation shall sing:
Satan is vanquished, and Jesus is King:

Charles Silvester Horne

Reading: Ezekiel 34 : 11 - 16 & 20 - 24

“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered.

I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.”

First Reflection

The Sovereign Lord says “I myself will judge”.

Picture all the people gathering before the Son of Man on the day of judgment - all the characters we’ve met over the year. There are kings from the east and an inn keeper; there’s Mary the mother of Jesus and Joseph her husband; chief priests and scribes and Pharisees; Pilate and Herod and Caiphas. Then there’s Peter - so many times, usually getting things wrong; the disciples - still arguing about who gets to sit at Jesus’ right hand; Judas, Nicodemus and Matthew the tax collector; the many times married Samaritan woman at the well; lots and lots of children; the hungry five thousand and countless number of the harassed; the helpless and the sick. Each time they’ve encountered Jesus it has been decision time for them. They’ve been challenged by him to act, to put the other first, to show faith and turn away from fear. And those who followed him learnt the cost of love.

So, now that we have reached the end of our church year we are back where we started - with the judgment of the approaching kingdom. Now, this final story is about the moment of its arrival. It is interesting to realise that the descriptions of how Jesus expects us to behave do not actually mention the word love but give concrete examples of what love in action looks like. All Jesus’ ministry has been a model of ‘love in action’; love the verb, the doing word, not some vague state of a warm good feeling inside.

Think about the festival we celebrate today - Christ the King - the unique King we have in Jesus. Here is a throne and a king but not like any king we have ever seen in history. This king’s strength lies in the deep care for all of his subjects. He identifies them all as his ‘equal in need’. This is a king who gives away his power and shares his inheritance. Being a king does not make you God but being God includes being a king.

Think about the past year and ask yourself where you have been of use to others and where you have helped others to survive or grow or heal. There has been no point in looking at the life of Jesus in the Gospels or considering his words or contemplating his glory if we have not grown to be more like him in thought and word and deed.

StF 323 – I will sing the wondrous story

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| 1) I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
How he left the realms of glory
For the cross on Calvary: | 3) Faint was I, and fears possessed me,
Bruised was I from many a fall;
Hope was gone, and shame distressed me;
But his love has pardoned all: |
| Ch) <i>Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it with his saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.</i> | 4) Days of darkness still come o'er me;
Sorrow's paths I often tread;
But the Saviour still is with me,
By his hand I'm safely led: |
| 2) I was lost; but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Raised me up, and gently led me
Back into the narrow way: | 5) He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet;
Then he'll bear me safely over,
Where the loved ones I shall meet: |

Reading: Matthew 25 : 31 - 46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Second Reflection

Matthew Chapter 25 is all about preparedness. First of all there are the foolish bridesmaids who ran out of oil and so missed the wedding. Then there is the slave who wasted his chance of increasing his one talent while the master was away. And now we have the sheep and the goats. All of these people and groups are unprepared for what is about to happen and they face terrible consequences. For the stories are not just about the importance of being ready but also about judgment.

The people in the stories make their judgment; the foolish bridesmaids decide there is no great rush; the slave with one talent decides to do nothing; and the ‘goats’ decide that some people are not worth bothering about. God then makes His judgement and, unfortunately, it is completely different from theirs. All the people standing at the throne of glory are taken aback by God’s judgment and, more particularly, by God’s judge. They were not expecting to see Jesus, the Son of Man, up there on the throne looking completely at home with angels around him carrying on as if they thought he was God.

As the people are separated into two groups, one on the right hand and one on the left of this awesome yet recognisable figure, it is clear that both of these groups are equally puzzled. They are both, you might say, unprepared for this standard of judgment. None of them had lived their lives expecting to be judged by this Man, in this way. As their sentences are handed down both groups say ‘We didn’t know we would be judged for that.’

The judge does not explain himself but he could have pointed to both the law and the prophets which make it clear what God expects. The reading from Ezekiel shows God himself looking for the lost sheep and longing to care for them. It also shows God’s judgment on those ‘fat sheep’ who kept the pasture for themselves and deliberately pushed away the hungry and the needy. Any well-brought-up Jew (and we could say ‘Any Christian’) listening to Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats would recognise the judgment handed out to the goats. No one could say they were not warned about the nature of God.

So how did they - and how do we - manage to be so deceived? How have we managed to persuade ourselves that there would be no consequences for the way we live?

How do we not realise that we are the fat sheep pushing the starving millions away from the green fields? God is not far away in some distant 'heaven'. He is not easy to deceive and we can't plead that we don't know what he wants of us. We know perfectly well what the hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick and imprisoned people around us want and need!

Jesus, the Son of Man, is to be our judge and the human face he shows us is all too recognisable. That is why Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that they might come to know Jesus Christ. Although the judge in the story is Jesus, it is certainly true that the sheep didn't recognise him in those whom they helped. They did their good deeds without any ulterior motives, looking for no recognition. The knowledge of God that the Ephesians had sounds like theoretical knowledge, not requiring them to behave in any particular way but with the obvious hope of a rich reward in heaven.

But if we look more closely that is far from the truth. When we - His Church acknowledge him as our King and become his body, we can have no illusions as to what his body looks like. We believe in God's great power at work in Jesus, bringing 'life out of death'. And so we, his body, work to bring life out of death to all around us. We work to pay attention to the real human beings with whom God, in Jesus, came to identify

Prayer

Son of Man and King of all, I bow my head to your judgment and I lift up my heart to you in thanksgiving for your gospel of good news. In serving others, may I serve you and in serving you, grow into your likeness and so be welcomed into your eternal kingdom. **Amen**

StF 357 – Jesus the name high over all

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| 1) Jesus - the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
And devils fear and fly. | 4) O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
Would all the earth embrace. |
| 2) Jesus - the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
It turns their hell to heaven. | 5) His only righteousness I show,
His saving grace proclaim;
'Tis all my business here below
To cry: 'Behold the Lamb!' |
| 3) Jesus - the prisoner's fetters breaks,
And bruises Satan's head;
Power into strengthless souls it speaks,
And life into the dead. | 6) Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
Preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!' |

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Intercession

God has made Jesus head of the Church and ruler of all creation. Let us pray in his name for our own needs, the needs of the Church and the needs of the world.

We pray for the leaders of the Church worldwide. For our own Church leaders at National, District, Circuit and local level that they may give an example of loving service of their sisters and brothers in the Church. Let us pray to the Lord - **Your kingdom come**

For temporal leaders, that as they work to build the earthly city, they may not lose sight of the heavenly kingdom

Let us pray to the Lord - **Your kingdom come**

For the poor of the world, that they may experience the love of Christ through the care and concern of his followers.

Let us pray to the Lord - **Your kingdom come**

For all gathered here, that the words of Jesus, 'Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me', may influence all our dealings with others

Let us pray to the Lord - **Your kingdom come**

For our deceased relatives and friends that the Lord may bring them into the kingdom of His glory.

Let us pray to the Lord - **Your kingdom come**

For our own special needs and the needs of those known to us.....

Let us pray to the Lord - **Your kingdom come**

God of mercy, your Son so loved the world that he gave his life for our salvation. May we have the courage to live by that same love, so that we may share in the joy of the kingdom, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Reading: Ephesians 1 : 15 - 23

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

StF 319 – Christ triumphant

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| 1) Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
Hear us as we sing: | 3) Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,
Victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
Sinners justified: |
| <i>Ch) Yours the glory and the crown,
The high renown,
The eternal name!</i> | 4) Priestly king, enthroned for ever
High in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
Stifle hymns of love: |
| 2) Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
By Your humble birth: | 5) So, our hearts and voices raising
Through the ages long,
Ceaselessly upon You gazing,
This shall be our song: |

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Blessing

May the Lord bless you with a noble and generous heart. May he keep you joyful in his service. And may he lead you through the darkness of this world to the radiant glory of his kingdom. **Amen.**