

A service for 20th November, 2022 (StF) Christ the King

Call to Worship: “StF” 426 (Hark! My soul, it is the Lord) verse 4 – William Cowper

Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

Today we celebrate Christ the King. We shall sing a hymn written by David Evans as a response to many of the hymns, choruses and worship songs of the 1970s that he felt were over-familiar to the Lord. It reminds us of God’s power, holiness and glory – as hymns ought to! We shall sing hymn number 20, “Be still, for the presence of the Lord,”

1. Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;

Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.

In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

2. Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;

He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.

How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light;

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

3. Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;

He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.

No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place. © David J. Evans

Let us pray.

Sovereign God, in the power of your Word you created the universe and everything that lives within it; in your everlasting compassion you sustain all life and in your boundless grace you offer salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. Throughout human history, despite our sinfulness, you have tried to draw us close to you through the prophets and patriarchs. Even when we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, you came to us as Jesus, to reveal your redemptive love by his life, death and resurrection.

Therefore, take away any anxious or distracting thoughts, so we can pray to you in faith, sing our hymns joyfully and both hear and respond to your holy word. All honour, power and glory are yours, our heavenly King. Amen.

In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, ‘Lord, in your mercy’ please respond with, ‘Hear our prayer’. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all that you give us, do for us and achieve in us, for we know how you have blessed us from our earliest days. Thank you, too, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us and for experiences and opportunities that have given meaning to our lives. Most of all, Lord, thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, without whom we are lost, hopeless and helpless.

Merciful God, when we think about our own lives, we see how we let you down, because we say and do things that hurt and upset others and we sometimes don’t help people we see are in distress or in difficulties. We occasionally act before we think and are unwilling to forgive those who have upset us. Lord, help us to change our ways, and forgive us as we learn to set aside old grievances.

‘Lord, in your mercy’ ‘Hear our prayer’.

Heavenly Father, forgive us for our unwillingness to see our neighbours as Jesus sees them, especially those whose lifestyles, attitudes and beliefs differ markedly from ours. Warm our souls with your love, so we may serve you with Christ at the heart of all we do and say.

'Lord, in your mercy'..... 'Hear our prayer'.

Gracious, loving God, you assure us that our sins are forgiven and call us to follow you. Help us serve our neighbours with humble, caring hearts, so that our lives bring honour to your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we say:

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 second hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for 'Spring Harvest' in 1984 and reminds us that Jesus came to serve and love us, not to Lord it over us. We shall sing hymn number 272, 'The Servant King'

**1. From heaven You came,
Helpless babe, entered our world,
Your glory veiled; not to be served
But to serve and give Your life
That we might live. *Chorus:***

***This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.***

**2. There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not My will but Yours,' He said. *Chorus:***

**3. Come see His hands and His feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice ;
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered. *Chorus:***

**4. So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone Him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving. *Chorus:***

© Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

In our prayers of intercession we bring our concerns to God.

King of Kings and God of all nations, you came as Jesus to bring healing to this beautiful, but broken world and so we turn to you in prayer, asking you to help us to change our ways, so that we always seek the well-being of people whose lives touch ours. Help us to act as your earthly hands by reaching out and offering practical support to neighbours who are in need or distress. Lord, grant us strength, faith, steadfastness and compassion we need to show your love for all-comers.

Help us to play our part, however small it may be, in building a better, fairer world by encouraging one another to share the earth's resources rather than fighting over

them; by caring for our environment, so generations that succeed us will inherit an inhabitable planet; help us to stand up for justice for everybody and let us play our part in supporting the poor and marginalised here and abroad by supporting foodbanks and charities like All We Can and Christian Aid.

Lord of all, we pray for an end to the wars that rage around the world, resulting in death, injury and destruction both to combatants and civilians and national infrastructure. Bring an end to conflicts between Palestinians and Jews in Jerusalem, civil strife in Iran and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

Inspire and guide leaders of the nations of the world, granting them wisdom and compassion so they lead their people with mercy and justice and do not resort to violence in order to have their own way. Teach them the value of negotiation and compromise when disagreements arise, compared with the use of aggressive force.

Remember, heavenly Father, the victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and persecution: people who have lost loved-ones; widows and orphans; those who have suffered life changing injuries in body, mind and spirit and the many refugees who have been forced to flee their homes to seek safety abroad. Warm our hearts with your compassion, so we ensure that they are given the support they need to have a fresh start and hope for the future.

Generous God, we pray for the victims of recent natural disasters, that they may receive speedy help. We remember, too, our neighbours in countries facing severe famines, where droughts and warfare have exacerbated the situation. We ask a blessing on organizations like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid which are working to provide them with desperately-needed aid. May they succeed in bringing relief to those needy lands.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy and rise in inflation increases to record levels and we thank you for food banks and for other organisations which are helping the poor. Despite the dire economic situation, may the Government and other agencies, including the Church, find ways of helping people who are facing the awful choice of heating their homes, or eating to manage during the coming winter.

Lord of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, we offer our prayer for neighbours who are ill, or in any kind of need or trouble, but, particularly, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear, whether recently or long ago, and find it difficult to come to terms with their grief. In a time of quiet reflection, we offer names of those for whom we are particularly concerned – confident that, as we name them in our hearts, you will know and meet their needs.

Heavenly Father, help us to support them in whatever way we can, but embrace them all with your love, so they may be healed, comforted, given hope, encouraged and blessed with enduring peace.

Lord, we pray for our church, all churches in our district and, indeed, for the World Church. As we emerge from the dark shadow of Coronavirus into a financial crisis, help us to renew and alter our ministries to our communities, so we can meet our neighbours' needs and offer not only healing but evidence of Christ's love for all-comers. Grant us faith to bear the gospel light of hope and joy to our suffering, sin-darkened world.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us to share the abundance of your love with all-comers, thereby glorifying your name, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 23 verses 33 to 43

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him:

“Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him.

“Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him,

“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Amen.

We shall sing a hymn that first appeared in the appendix of ‘Hymns Ancient & Modern’ in 1868. The author of the hymn was the chairman of the hymnal’s compilers, but the hymn appeared by merit alone. Sir Henry Williams Baker was the eldest son of Vice Admiral Sir Henry Loraine Baker and succeeded to the baronetcy in 1859. In 1851 he became the vicar of Monkland, a small parish in Herefordshire, near to the Welsh border. Sir Henry remained in Monkland for twenty six years, spurning opportunities that his rank and academic skills might have been expected to have afforded him. Sir Henry died in 1877, uttering the words of the third verse of the hymn we’re about to sing, Number 649, ‘The King of love my Shepherd is’.

**1. The King of love my shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.**

**2. Where streams of living water flow,
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.**

**3. Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.**

**4. In death’s dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.**

**5. Thou spread’st a table in my sight;
Thy unction grace bestoweth;
And O what transport of delight / From thy pure chalice floweth!**

6. And so through all the length of days

Thy goodness faileth never:

Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise

Within thy house for ever.

© Henry Williams Baker {1821 – 1877}

Sermon: *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* Luke 23:42

It may seem strange that, as today's lectionary is about Christ the King, we have the paradox of a reading where God's Son is dying on a cross like a criminal, with an inscription, **“This is the King of the Jews”** in Latin, Greek and Aramaic over his head. However, it shows the difference between human and divine expectations of kingship. Most people associate royalty with power and pomp, of Kings and Queens being immaculately-dressed in fine clothes, their arrival being announced by heralds, with many servants fulfilling even their smallest whim, precious gifts being offered by their subjects and, in earlier ages, of their power of life and death over the people.

Most Jews believed that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David, who, although the greatest of Israel's kings, was still a very flawed man, yet God still loved and favoured him. They expected the Christ to be of royal birth, of high estate and easily recognizable, yet Jesus was a son of a young Galilean woman and a village carpenter from Nazareth, a settlement planted amongst Gentiles to reclaim 'Jewish' land, in many ways like some of the Israeli kibbutzim or settlements on Palestinian territory near Jerusalem today. Galileans were considered inferior provincials. No prophet was expected to emerge from Galilee, let alone the Messiah, though some false-Messiahs had led insurrections against the occupying Romans and had been put down with great bloodshed, so Galileans were seen as trouble-makers, too.

In verse three of Charles Wesley's hymn, 'And can it be', we have the wonderful expression of kenosis, of Jesus being God in our human form, emptied of all his power except love, having left the glories of heaven, to bleed for **'Adam's helpless race'**. Our Lord entered the world in the squalor of a stable and lived humbly without privileges. No palaces, servants and guards for him: no silken sheets, fine clothes or special food. He lived among ordinary people like us and when he began his ministry, he chose working people, including a tax-collector, not rabbis, religious scholars or members of the Judean hierarchy. He outraged Pharisees and Scribes by seeking out the sinners: ceremonially unclean people, the blind, physically and mentally handicapped people, lepers, fallen women, tax-collectors, Gentiles and even occupying Romans, offering them healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. His opponents considered that no true king would act in such a way, so they not only rejected him, but sought his death. They were too spiritually blind to see that Christ's kingdom is love that encompasses everybody, irrespective of race, colour, creed, politics, gender, physical and mental health or lifestyle. His arms are open wide to embrace all who will turn to him, even secularists like Richard Dawkins and they are open till the last second of the fifty-ninth minute of time itself.

Our reading deals with Jesus' crucifixion, with Pontius Pilate's contemptuous charge inscribed in Latin, Greek and Aramaic, so everybody could know Christ and his 'crime'. It depicts God's beloved Son stripped of his clothes to add humiliation to the agony of hanging on the cross, God's beloved Son betrayed by an associate for a month's wages, abandoned by his friends, condemned by Pilate, though the Governor knew him to be innocent, scornfully dressed in a purple robe with a crown of thorns forced into his head, then savagely beaten by soldiers and later mocked by his enemies as he hung, dying. Where, you may ask, is kingship in this reading?

The first and greatest evidence of divine kingship is found in the amazingly gracious plea, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”**, for

despite his agony and shame as he was crucified, the Son of God did not call down an army of angels to save him and wreak vengeance upon his adversaries. **Instead, Jesus forgave those who sought and took his life, not because they asked forgiveness of him, but because he loved them despite their sinfulness, just as he loves us, though we are sinners, too.**

Whereas earthly rulers expect to be treated with the utmost respect and deference, God's Son was vilified and mocked by contemptuous opponents, even by one of the two criminals who were crucified alongside him. Nevertheless, Jesus made no attempt to exchange curses, but instead listened to the plea for mercy from the man hanging next to him, who had rebuked other criminal, declaring, **"We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."** The next words, **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,"** echo through the ages, for that is our plea as well: we all stand in need of Christ's grace – his unearned, unmerited, freely-given love.

I have not yet mentioned kingly power – the power of life and death, yet, even as he hung, dying on the cross, Jesus granted eternal life to the repentant criminal, as he does to anybody who turns to him in faith, asking for forgiveness. Christ Jesus has the power to do so, because by making himself the one perfect sacrifice for all the world's sins, he broke the power of Satan once and for all. Moreover, he showed the amazing power of kingly love, for although he was totally helpless on the cross – unable even to brush away the flies that settled on his wounds – Jesus' love was stronger than the hatred of human hearts and all the forces of sin: at Calvary love triumphed over hatred; goodness over sin. Three days later, when God the Father raised him from the tomb, his resurrection offers us the priceless gift of eternal life through faith alone.

God's King is a suffering servant: a King who emptied himself of all divine powers, except for love; a King who cares little for riches, but who loved the poor and disfranchised with a passion; who gave the most precious thing any of us can offer, his life, for all people – even his enemies. What gift does Christ Jesus ask in return? Neither gold, nor fine jewels, nor flawless pearls, but our hearts. **All Jesus wants is for us to love and serve him, to answer our call to be part of the kingdom of God, caring for other people and sharing his love with both friends and the strangers we meet day by day. Amen.**

Our closing hymn was written in 1909 by Revd. Charles Silvester Horne, a Congregational Minister and father of the entertainer Kenneth Horne, best – known for the "Round the Horne" radio series. It was Revd. Horne's version of Charles Gabriel's 'Glory Song'. We shall sing hymn number 185, 'Sing we the King who is coming to reign'.

**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: *Chorus*
*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: *Chorus***

**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: *Chorus***

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

© *Charles Silvester Horne (1865 – 1914)*

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and forever more. Amen.