

**A service for 21<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2021 (Christ the King) (StF)**

**Call to Worship: Isaiah chapter 32 verses 1 to 3 (New Century Bible)**

A king will rule in a way that brings justice, and leaders will make fair decisions. Then each ruler will be like a shelter from the wind, like a safe place in a storm, like streams of water in a dry land, like a cool shadow from a large rock in a hot land. People will look to the king for help, and they will truly listen to what he says. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by a Rector of Lower Brixham, Revd. Henry Francis Lyte. When he was ordained, most church music was either metrical psalms, or hymns closely linked to them and Rev. Lyte felt that parishioners deserved better, so he produced a book, "Spirit of the Psalms" in 1834, in which several excellent adaptations of Psalms were found, the most famous of which is a paraphrase of Psalm 103, 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven'. Henry Lyte wanted to write something that he could leave behind to 'live to the glory of God'; a hymn that would not be ephemeral. He achieved his aim by writing both this hymn and 'Abide with me'. We shall sing hymn number 83, 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven'.*

**1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
To his feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like thee his praise should sing?  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise the everlasting King!**

**2. Praise him for his grace and favour  
To our fathers in distress;  
Praise him still, the same for ever,  
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Glorious in his faithfulness.**

**3. Father-like, he tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame he knows;  
In His hands he gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Widely as his mercy flows.**

**4. Angels in the height, adore him,  
Ye behold him face to face;  
Sun and moon, bow down before him,  
Dwellers all in time and space.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise with us the God of grace!**

© Henry Francis Lyte {1793 – 1847}

***Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.***

Almighty and Everlasting God, whose Word created the universe from darkness and chaos; you breathe life into every living being and you provide the needs of your creation by your constant love. Your power and wisdom are as unfathomable as the height, depth and breadth of your love, yet we know you care for sinful human beings so much you have tried to draw us close to you from the beginning of time. Although

you spoke to us through the prophets and patriarchs, we did not listen and rebelled against you. However, instead of rejecting, or punishing us, you took our mortal form and came to us as Christ the King.

Jesus lived among us, without rank or privilege, to reveal your true nature in his teaching and healing, but he paid the price for all sins on a cross at Calvary. By his resurrection, Jesus broke the power of death and he offers us new life through faith in him, through his grace alone. Therefore, Lord, we come to you with joyful hearts, asking you to take away all anxieties that may distract us from worship, in the name of Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

***Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession to the Lord.***

Heavenly Father, we offer thanks for the many blessings we receive from you, day by day: for the beautiful, self-sustaining, yet fragile world on which we live; for the many good things we enjoy; for people who have blessed us by their example and loving-care, but most of all that you love us even at our worst, when we are loveless and unlovable.

Merciful Lord, pardon us when we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves, for our words and actions that hurt others and grieve you and for times when we see neighbours in need or distress and don't help them. Forgive us, too, for our failure commit ourselves to you and your call to us to serve you. Help us to change our ways, so that our lives become Christ-centred, not self-centred.

Gracious and faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and in boundless grace have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow once more. Therefore, Lord, as you offer us a fresh start, fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in the blessed name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend. Amen.

***As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:***

**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.**

***The next hymn is based upon Philippians chapter 2 verse 10 and it was written by an Anglican priest's daughter, Caroline Noel, for Ascension Day in 1870 We sing hymn number 317, 'At the name of Jesus,'***

**1. At the name of Jesus**

**Every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue confess him  
King of glory now.**

**'Tis the Father's pleasure  
We should call him Lord,  
Who from the beginning  
Was the mighty Word.**

**2. Humbled for a season,**

**To receive a name  
From the lips of sinners  
Unto whom he came,  
Faithfully he bore it  
Spotless to the last,**

**Brought it back victorious,  
When from death he passed:**

**3. Bore it up triumphant  
With its human light,  
Through all ranks of creatures  
To the central height,  
To the throne of Godhead,  
To the Father's breast;  
Filled it with the glory  
Of that perfect rest.**

**4. In your hearts enthrone him;  
There let him subdue  
All that is not holy,  
All that is not true;  
Crown him as your Captain  
In temptation's hour:  
Let his will enfold you  
In its light and power.**

**5. For this same Lord Jesus  
Shall return again,  
With his Father's glory,  
With his angel train;  
All the wreaths of empire  
Meet upon his brow,  
And our hearts confess him / King of Glory now.**

© *Caroline Maria Noel {1817 – 1877}*

***In our prayer of Intercession, we pray for our world. Let us pray.***

Lord of all, we recognize your faithfulness in meeting our daily needs and for loving us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, to show us how to live as you want us, by offering healing and hope to our broken world. Therefore, we pray for our neighbours, both near to us and far away: for people who are facing hardship and suffering. Grant us the faith and compassion to act as your earthly hands, reaching out to offer practical support to neighbours who are in need or distress, but where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to intervene, for nothing is impossible to you.

Heavenly King, give the rulers of the world's nations both wisdom and compassion to care for the well-being of the people they govern. Teach them to seek justice and to deal mercifully, for only when justice and mercy prevail can there be real peace. We pray for an end to conflicts and wars around the world which don't only cause injury, death and destruction, but swell the number of refugees who are seeking to escape from terror and suffering. Hear our prayer for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice across the world, especially at present in Afghanistan, now controlled by the Taliban and facing heart-breaking problems, and also Sudan where civil conflict seems likely to result in a devastating famine.

God of creation, we are aware of recent terrible floods and wildfires on several continents which are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We pray that the declarations at the COP26 conference won't just be empty pledges, but will encourage all of us to begin the necessary changes to our lifestyles before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

Lord of health and wellbeing, hear our prayer for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, including people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families who are seeking to support them. Grant them healing, renewed strength and hope, not only as a result of the professional care and support they receive, but by experiencing your presence in their time need.

We remember, too, neighbours who, as a result of the pandemic, are lonely, afraid, unemployed, in debt, or feeling abandoned and unloved and, especially everyone who has lost loved ones during this time of pandemic. In a period of silence, we shall bring to you the names of people for whom we are concerned ..... Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, in which they may find healing, courage, comfort and peace.

God our Saviour, we ask your blessing upon people who have worked steadfastly to support us throughout this pandemic: the NHS, carers, scientists and key-workers throughout the country. May they be successful and safe in their endeavours, dear Lord.

Sovereign God, help us to find new ways to serve our community as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. We pray for our church, our Circuit and for the worldwide Church: unite us in love and outreach, so our words and actions bring good news to our neighbours and reveal that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world.

Loving Lord, we don't know what others will ask of us, so we pray for the Spirit to guide and encourage us when times are difficult, for vision and hope to enable us to take a risk for the sake of the gospel and courage to remain true to the teaching of Christ.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead good lives but to boldly take the light of the gospel to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn written by Graham Kendrick for "Spring Harvest" in 1983. 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*

**The Gospel reading is John chapter 18 verses 33 to 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. "It was your people and your chief priests who 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 Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

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

Jesus answered,

"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." Amen.

**Address – "Are you the King of the Jews?" John 18:33**

If you look at the picture of our Kings and Queen at their coronation, you see they hold the sceptre in their right hand to show they hold power over their subjects as long as they live. They hold the orb in their left hand to show that the monarch is God's representative over the kingdom, that they have been consecrated by God's power. Kings and queens are still considered very important people: they used to rule their people without a parliament to control them, but although their power has diminished, our Queen has to sign Bills from Parliament before they can become laws.

At the time of Jesus, the Romans controlled Judea and they put Herod the Great as its king. Although he began to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem to please Jews, Herod was a dangerous man, killing one of his wives and two sons, amongst many others. Like kings of his time, Herod had power of life and death over his subjects and he could promote or get rid of anyone according to how he felt. Kings were rich, enjoyed luxury and expected to be honoured wherever they went. They made their own laws and always sat in the position of honour. Even the Roman Governors treated the King of Judea with respect. By the time of our gospel reading Herod the Great was dead and three of his sons had ruled the land which had been divided among them. One son, **Archelaus** had been exiled and replaced by **Pontius Pilate** which is why Jesus was appearing before him in our reading.

Pilate held the Jews and the Jewish faith in contempt, which did not help his governorship. He was more a military man than a politician and his role was marred by a number of conflicts, the first occurring almost as soon as he was appointed, according to the historian, Josephus. Pilate allowed the Roman troops to take their standards into Jerusalem and, as they contained images of the Emperor, Jews considered them to be idolatrous and made such a fuss that Pilate had to have them removed. He caused offence again when he installed some golden shields in his Jerusalem residence which again were deemed idolatrous, but he refused to remove them until the Jews threatened to appeal to **Emperor Tiberius**.

The Sanhedrin took Jesus to Pilate just before Pessach, the Passover Festival, not because they liked or respected the Governor, but because they were afraid of a

backlash from ordinary Jews, were they to try to put him to death – whereas the anger of the masses would be redirected towards the occupying Romans if they executed Jesus. Moreover, the Jewish authorities wanted to make an example of Christ, for whilst they had the power to put people to death by stoning, the Romans used crucifixion, which was a slow, tortuous method of execution – a warning to others.

The Sanhedrin knew that a charge of blasphemy itself would be difficult to prove to a sympathetic Roman Governor, far more so when Pilate was openly hostile. Therefore, they sought to impeach Jesus on three counts that they thought would alarm, or infuriate Pilate: they accused Jesus of trying to subvert the Jews, of opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar and of claiming to be **'Christ, a king'**. Whilst charges of blasphemy would have been scoffed at, any threat against Rome, especially a challenge against Caesar, must be taken seriously, so Pilate summoned Jesus before him. Clearly, Jesus' humble appearance amazed the Governor, for the translation of his question, **'Are you the king of the Jews?'** fails to carry the sense of wonder in the original Greek. A better translation would be, **'Are you really the king of the Jews, poor creature that you are?'** Jesus responded by asking whether Pilate himself was accusing him, or was he acting on the reports of other people, to which the Governor said contemptuously, **'Am I a Jew? It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me.'** He asked Jesus, **'What is it you have done?'** Here was a man unmoved by faith or cultural matters, concerned simply with politics and whether or not Jesus posed a threat to Rome.

Jesus' answer reassured Pilate that he was neither a zealot, nor a guerrilla leader, set on temporal power, for his kingdom was not a worldly one. Had it been so, his servants – probably an army of angels – would have fought to resist his arrest. However, Pilate seized on the word, **'kingdom'**, and said, **'You are a king, then!'** Jesus affirmed this, but said that his kingdom is the kingdom of truth and added, **"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."** The Governor was unmoved by Jesus' words and asked a question that has echoed down the centuries, **"What is truth?"** Pilate was a man more concerned by political advantage than in mercy and justice, for although he believed Jesus was wholly innocent, he played a cynical game, trying to have Jesus released by public demand and when told that if he released Christ he would be showing disloyalty to Caesar, Pilate simply condemned our Lord, even though he had committed no crime – his life was simply of no account.

Pontius Pilate demanded to know what truth is, as though it is a commodity that can be bought and sold, the property of the powerful and wealthy. We live in times when spin-doctors regularly distort the truth for their own political ends, times when politicians who have behaved badly, sneer that **'it is within the rules'**, as though that exonerates their dishonourable conduct. We live in an era when a recent survey suggested that more than half the respondents believe it acceptable to pilfer from work and to be unfaithful to husband, wife, or partner.

The gospels proclaim Jesus' kingship as radical, life-changing and life-affirming, for he brought healing of body, mind and spirit to the sick, he offered forgiveness and reconciliation to the most despised of sinners and reached beyond the boundaries of Judaism to offer grace to Gentiles – even to the Jews' bitterest enemies, the Samaritans. Instead of seeking power, Christ gave it up, to die helplessly on a cross for sinners like us – indeed, for everybody. **Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Truth is that God loves us all with such a passion he gave the most precious One of all to redeem us from sin, to offer us new life and a new covenant based on love and faith, not on observing an intricate set of rules. Truth is that Christ Jesus calls us**

to love one another, to the share the love he freely gives us, for only by loving our neighbours can they see value and truth in the Good News our Saviour brought for all. Let us carry this truth in our hearts as we enter Advent, as we make a place in our hearts fit for Christ Jesus. Amen.

*How many of you remember the radio series, "Round the Horne"? Well, it may interest you to know that our closing hymn was written in 1909 by Revd. Charles Silvester Horne, the father of Kenneth Horne! We conclude our worship as we 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, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.