

Christ the King
Circuit Service, Sunday 22nd November 2020
Farnworth and Worsley Circuit



Call to Worship:

We have been called into the pastures of God,
where there is nurture, a place to rest,
safety, and kindness among all.
Let us draw near, in the goodness of God,
to be with each other,
and to praise the shepherd who has gathered us here.
Amen.

Welcome:

You are all welcome as we gather in our different places to worship
God. Come, wait a while, stay a while, welcomed you'll be. And you
are welcome.

We are grateful for Sarah preaching for us today and to all who have
contributed to the service. But all of us, you, me, everyone, is part of
this worship. We belong to God; we belong to each other. Today is
the Sunday before Advent. Christmas, believe it or not, is on the
horizon, and today is known as the Sunday of Christ the King.

Let us pray.

God, we have been a scattered people,
roaming, looking for places to call home.
You have called us home, gathered us in,
given us a land of belonging where all are welcome.
You have sought us out, brought us in,
and held us in this great story.

Amen.

Hymn:

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|---|--|
| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | 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! |

Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

Prayers of Praise and Confession:

*When I say the words 'We are the people of your pasture' will you
respond with, 'We are the sheep of your hand.'*

Loving God, we adore you,
Sovereign of all, we praise your holy name.
For you are our God and our King:
We are the people of your pasture
We are the sheep of your hand.

Suffering Christ, we adore you,
Saviour of all, we praise your holy name.
For you are our God and our King:
We are the people of your pasture
We are the sheep of your hand.

Joyous Spirit, we adore you,
Freedom of all, we praise your holy name.
For you are our God and our King:
We are the people of your pasture
We are the sheep of your hand.

Shepherd God -our Maker,
Redeemer and Friend -we adore you,
singing for joy in your presence,
worshipping you with thanksgiving,
humbling our pride with praise.
For you are our strength, our protection and our hope,
source of goodness and love, faith and healing;
and with all the earth we call out to you in gladness,
before all the world we bless you as our King:
We are the people of your pasture
We are the sheep of your hand.

Now let us confess our sins to God.

Holy God, we confess that often
we have failed to be an obedient church.
We have not done your will;
we have broken your law;
we have rebelled against your love;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Forgive us, we pray,
and free us to serve you with joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
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.

Reading: Ezekiel 34: 11 -16, 20-24 (Revised English Bible)

For the Lord God says: Now I myself shall take thought for my sheep and search for them. As a shepherd goes in search of his sheep when his flock is scattered from him in every direction, so I shall go in search of my sheep and rescue them, no matter where they were scattered in a day of cloud and darkness. I shall lead them out from the nations, gather them in from different lands, and bring them home to their own country. I shall shepherd them on the mountains of Israel and by her streams, wherever there is a settlement. I shall feed them on good grazing- ground, and their pasture will be Israel's high mountains. There they will rest in good pasture, and find rich grazing on the mountains of Israel.

I myself shall tend my flock, and find them a place to rest, says the Lord God. I shall search for the lost, recover the straggler, bandage the injured, strengthen the sick, leave the healthy and strong to play, and give my flock their proper food.

Therefore, the Lord God says to them: Now I myself shall judge between the fat sheep and the lean. You push aside the weak with flank and shoulder, you butt them with your horns until you have scattered them in every direction. Therefore I shall save my flock, and they will be ravaged no more; I shall judge between one sheep and another. I shall set over them one shepherd to take care of them, my servant David; he will care for them and be their shepherd. I, the Lord, shall be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken.

Hymn:

Everyone needs compassion,
love that's never failing;
let mercy fall on me.
Everyone needs forgiveness,
the kindness of a Saviour;
the Hope of nations.

*Saviour,
he can move the mountains,
my God is mighty to save,
he is mighty to save.
Forever,
Author of salvation,
he rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave.*

So take me as you find me,
all my fears and failures;
fill my life again.
I give my life to follow
everything I believe in;
now I surrender.

Saviour ...

Shine your light
and let the whole world see,
we're singing for the glory
of the risen King, Jesus.
Shine your light
and let the whole world see
we're singing for the glory
of the risen King.

*Saviour,
he can move the mountains,
my God is mighty to save,
he is mighty to save.
Forever,
Author of salvation,
he rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave.*

Reuben Morgan and Ben Fielding

Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23 (New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised)

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all

things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Reading: Matthew 25:31-46 (New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised)

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

Hymn:

King of kings, majesty,
God of heaven living in me.
Gentle Saviour, closest Friend,
Strong Deliverer, Beginning and End,
all within me falls at your throne.

*Your majesty, I can but bow;
I lay my all before you now.
In royal robes I don't deserve,
I live to serve your majesty.*

Earth and heaven worship you,
Love eternal, faithful and true,
who bought the nations, ransomed souls,
brought this sinner near to your throne ;
all within me cries out in praise.

*Your majesty, I can but bow;
I lay my all before you now.
In royal robes I don't deserve,
I live to serve your majesty,
I live to serve your majesty.*

Jarrod Cooper

Reflection: Rev. Sarah Knebel

There is in this week's readings so much for us to take away and mull over, I would, even before I begin, encourage you to take them away and to reflect on them yourselves throughout the week. What do they say to you?

This week, as we focus on Christ the King, what does it mean to be followers of a King of compassion, of a King who responds instinctively to human need?

If you have a pen and paper to hand you might want to write down some of your answers to the following questions:

If I asked you to name a good leader, who would you think of and why?

If I asked you to name a bad leader, who would you think of and why?

If you were asked to write down the qualities of a good shepherd, what would they be?

How similar would these qualities be to the qualities of the good leader you named earlier?

In our reading from Ephesians, Paul describes God using very conventional terms. He speaks of God's glory, wisdom, riches, immeasurable greatness, rule, authority, power and dominion. These are words shaped by the world in which Paul was trying to lead and guide the fragile new community of the church. Words that describe leadership in terms they would have been familiar with. In a world ruled by emperors and kings, who had no hesitation in exercising violence to secure their position, Ephesus was a place of power, a centre of imperial influence and a centre of religious power. It was a place in which many focussed their thoughts on power – power to make things happen in the world, power to influence people and events, power to gain wealth or health, power to bring about the downfall of those who oppose you. A world, you might say, that doesn't sound so unfamiliar.

In the midst of all of this, Paul is desperate to emphasise that the greatest display of power the world has ever seen, was when God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at God's right hand. Jesus, who now sits enthroned over the whole cosmos and who exercises power in a very different way. But Paul recognises that to see this power and to truly understand the meaning of God's kingdom riches and greatness, requires a fresh gift of wisdom from God and the ability to understand power differently.

The verses from the Gospel according to Matthew come at the end of a long discourse in which Jesus has denounced his own people, especially the would be leaders, for their failure to live as good people should. Here Jesus declares that he will judge people on how they treat other people. Those who act justly, who love mercy, who walk humbly and who treat others with compassion and kindness will be blessed. This sense of being blessed opens and closes Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Matthew. Cast your mind back to the beatitudes in Matthew 5 – blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness sake – the list goes on, but here those who are blessed are blessed because they act out of an instinctive response to need, out of a desire to see justice done and the same is true in Matthew 25. People are judged by the care and concern that they show to others in need. The emphasis is on just action that merits reward from Christ the King. What matters here is our openness to respond compassionately to human need.

Tom Wright writes, “justice is one of the most profound longings of the human race. If there is no justice, then deep within ourselves we know that something is not right.” Whilst justice is hard to define and harder still to practice, it has never stopped human beings and societies seeking it, praying for it and working to find ways of 'doing' justice better. Our longing for justice comes from our creator, from God, whose eventual judgement will be just and will put the world to rights. Part of the biblical image of the Son of Man, of Christ the King, is that justice will be done at last through him. In the words of Professor Allan Boesak, “Jesus is justice and justice is Jesus.” Justice is found in the empowering love and grace of Jesus.

Our reading today from Ezekiel puts across most strikingly this sense of justice. It too describes a separation of people based on the way that they treat others. In the reading the greatness of God is demonstrated in God's capacity to find, protect, provide for and guide God's people. God is presented as an alternative shepherd to the flock and described as one who is diligent and compassionate,

who will gather those who have been scattered, bind up the injured, strengthen the weak and provide sustenance for them. This is, however, in direct contrast to those who establish themselves as leaders, but who exercise an unjust form of power and control.

I always find it interesting when verses are left out from the lectionary to see what they have to say. In today's reading, verses 17 to 19 are missing, but I believe they speak volumes. They read, "Is it not enough for you to feed on good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet? I myself," it continues in verse 20, "will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you have scattered them far and wide." We are more familiar with the term 'fat cats' than 'fat sheep', but Ezekiel is clearly condemning practices where people with power get richer, while the powerless get poorer. Whilst Ezekiel appears to address leaders, as Jesus did, this does not get us off the hook, these comments are not exclusive to people in leadership. The disparity between rich and poor in the world has never been greater than it is today. None of us need to travel far from our homes to witness the disparity for ourselves, and yet we manage to convince ourselves that there will be no real consequences to the way that we live our lives? As we feed ourselves, why do we not realise that we too are the fat sheep who push the starving millions away from our green fields? Judgement here bears the human face of the neglected. God is not far away and is not easy to deceive. We cannot plead that we did not know what God wanted of us. We know perfectly well what the hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick people around us need. The human face of Jesus is all too recognisable today.

I am reminded here of the hymn by Stuart Townend, "Come all you vagabonds, come all you 'don't belongs', winners and losers, come, people like me. Come all you fallen, and come all you broken, find

strength for your body and food for your soul. Come to the feast, there is room at the table. Come let us meet in this place. With the King of all kindness, who welcomes us in, with the wonder of love, and the power of grace." Two things strike me about these words ... who are the 'vagabonds' and the 'don't belongs' in today's unjust society and what are we as churches and as people doing to welcome them in and to ensure that all people are treated justly? How do we recognise that none of us are perfect, that all of us fall short before God and not one of us acts justly, walks humbly or loves mercy all of the time? Yet by the love and grace of God, of Christ the King, we are all welcome at the table.

Mary Glover, who used to help run a food project in one of the poorest parts of Washington DC, always prayed before the hundreds of needy people came through the door, "Lord, we know you will be coming through this line today, so help us to treat you well!", which was her way of saying, help us to treat all people as we would treat you. Similarly, Mother Teresa is known to have talked about the way in which she helped some of the poorest people in India, as ministering to Jesus in his 'most distressing disguises.'

Where might we encounter Jesus in disguise in our community today and how will we treat him? As we look to the beginning of advent and wait with anticipation the coming of the Christ-child, the coming of Christ the King, how might we express compassion and kindness to others and respond instinctively to need as followers of Christ, the King of compassion?

Let us pray:

Loving God, in whom we live and move and have our being, as we go about our business this week may we tread with care, consume with moderation and share with generosity so that all your people might delight in your goodness and share in your riches. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Hymn:

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!

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!

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!

Ivor H. Jones (b.1934)

Prayers for others and for the world:

*When I say the words, 'Your kingdom come', will you respond with
'Your will be done.'*

Let us pray that we may serve Christ the King in meeting the needs
of others.

'When I was hungry, you gave me food;
when thirsty, you gave me drink.'
God with us, we pray for the hungry and thirsty
of our world:
for the victims of famine, drought, natural disaster
and the disruption of warfare.
Show us what we should do. *(Pause)*
Your kingdom come: **your will be done.**

'When I was a stranger, you took me into your home; when naked,
you clothed me.'
God with us, we pray for those without homes
or protection from the elements:
for refugees, the destitute, those thrown out of home,
those living on the street.
Show us what we should do. *(Pause)*
Your kingdom come: **your will be done.**

'When I was ill, you came to my help.'
God with us, we pray for those who are ill
for those in hospital, for those we know and love
those who are sick in mind or spirit.
We pray for those on our prayer list this week...
Show us what we should do. *(Pause)*
Your kingdom come: **your will be done.**

'When I was in prison, you visited me.'
God with us, we pray for those who are imprisoned:
for criminals and prisoners of conscience,
and those imprisoned by fear or guilt.
Show us what we should do. *(Pause)*
Your kingdom come: **your will be done.**

In Jesus' name we love and serve.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offering:

(For those who are setting aside their offering each week this prayer may be said:)

Loving God,
All that we have,
All that we do,
All that we are,
We offer to you,
In Jesus' Name.

Amen

Hymn:

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

Blessing:

O God of kindness,
send us out into your world.
Help us to see those moments where we can be kind.
Help us to live generous and loving lives,
so that we might see you
within these walls and beyond these walls.
And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
Be with us all, evermore.

Amen.

After Service Telephone Chat:

Sunday, 22nd November 2020 from 11:45 AM

If you are not able to join the online Zoom After Service Coffee and Chat, this option offers an opportunity to join Rev. Sarah Knebel and others around the circuit for a chat on the telephone.

Telephone Number: 0333 011 0616

Access code: 623 5908

Please note the call asks you to press the '£' key after entering the access code. You can either press the '#' key, or just wait, and you will be connected to the telephone chat.



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