

CHRIST THE KING 22ND NOVEMBER 2020

Welcome and Introduction

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Thank you for tuning in wherever you are, it is good that you are sharing with us, the last Sunday before Advent where we rejoice and celebrate that Christ is our King.

Let us pray.

Loving God, as we gather here as your family,
help us to worship you as king.

As we put aside the things that distract us,
may we enthrone you in our hearts.

As we leave behind the things that worry us,
help us to bow down before you and trust in your love.

As we forget about ourselves for now,
help us to look upon your majesty with love.

As we worship you with songs of praise,
help us to lift your name on high and glorify you our king.

Amen.

We sing together 'Christ is the King Oh Friends Rejoice!'

sung by St Martin's Voices

- 1 Christ is the King! O friends rejoice;
brothers and sisters, with one voice
tell all world he is your choice.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
- 2 O magnify the Lord, and raise
anthems of joy and holy praise
for Christ's brave saints of ancient days.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
- 3 O Christian women, Christian men,
all the world over, seek again
the way disciples followed then.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
- 4 Let love's unconquerable might
your scattered companies unite
in service to the Lord of light.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

5 So shall God's will on earth be done,
 new lamps be lit, new tasks begun,
 and the whole Church at last be one.
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

George K A Bell (1883-1958)
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Psalm 95:1-7

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
 let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before him with thanksgiving
 and extol him with music and song.

For the Lord is the great God,
 the great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth,
 and the mountain peaks belong to him.
The sea is his, for he made it,
 and his hands formed the dry land.

Come, let us bow down in worship,
 let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
for he is our God
 and we are the people of his pasture,
 the flock under his care.

Song:

Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name.

Confession and absolution

Jesus Christ our King says, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is close at hand. So let us turn away from sin and turn to the Lord, confessing our sins in penitence and faith

We confess we have sinned against kindness; we have offended gentleness and peace. We have sinned in anger and selfishness. We have inflicted injury on others as much in the things we have chosen not to do, as in the things we have done.

O king enthroned on high, filling the earth with your glory: holy is your name, Lord God almighty. In our sinfulness we cry to you to take our guilt away, and to cleanse our lips to speak your word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**
May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ “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. ³² 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, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ 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; ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.’ ³⁷ 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? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ 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,^[a] you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ 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; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ 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.’ ⁴⁴ 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?’ ⁴⁵ 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.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Sermon

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. It's the end and the climax of the Church's year, and next Sunday, Advent Sunday, we start over again.

For me, our bible passage immediately raises two questions: What kind of king? And, What does this king expect of his subjects?

I think there are a few things that help us make sense of this passage:

- This is a parable, not an attempt to accurately describe future events. Hyperbole is used, so we need to keep in perspective phrases like 'they will go away into eternal punishment'. I don't think Jesus is that kind of draconian king, it would go against his earthly lived example.
- It's also helpful to know that in many countries around the world, sheep and goats look almost exactly the same. A missionary in India once explained to me that, locally, you could only tell the difference by whether their tails went up or down! But these sheep and goats, in the parable, are separated by a shepherd who knows them well enough to tell almost identical animals apart. So our king is one who knows his people intimately.
- Finally, a human king expects honour, respect, obeisance and gifts to be given to them – for his subjects to show up and kneel before him. However, our king expects the same to be given to those in need. We honour the king when we honour the poor. Charity and compassion are markers of his kingdom, and that which separates people. All in all, we are dealing with a very different notion of kingship. Christ is king, but not a conventional one! Kingship is inverted and subverted.

Of course, this parable causes huge potential problems. Martin Luther, the great reformer, wanted the Epistle of James removed from the canon of scripture because he thought it proposed a theology of 'salvation by works' – that salvation could be earned by our deeds, and we could work our way into heaven. Luther wasn't standing for that, but promoted his theology of *sola fide*, that by faith alone could our justification be won. (I have to say, there are a number of bits of the bible I find a bit tricky, so do I get to toss them out too?).

The trouble with this parable is that the difference between our sheep and our goats was not their faith, faith is never mentioned; whether they went to eternal punishment or eternal life was entirely dependent on what they did or didn't do!

But in that same letter of James we read that 'faith without works is dead'. Belief can be iron clad, but without action, without expression, without compassion and love, it is nothing, it is dead.

Our king Jesus calls us not to death, but to life. And to live out our faith through acts of charity and compassion is not simply that which wins us some kind of eternal life in the future, but, as with all eternity, it begins in the here and now. Without acts of

love and mercy we are dead even though we breath, and Christ knows it. We need to live lives of love, compassion, mercy and charity to be truly alive today.

What kind of king is Christ our King? One who calls his people to act out faith in love, which is also to mirror his earthly life. He did not come to condemn, but that we 'might have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10.10). The sheep were already alive, and that life would continue beyond death. But the goats were already dead, and physical death would not change that.

I love this feast of Christ the King, because it reminds me once again that, as a subject of his kingdom, whatever small, fragile and weak things I do for the least of people, I do it as though for my king.

Gloria in Excelsis

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Reflection and Prayers of Intercession

Christ the King,

You came in humility and service, emptying yourself of love for the poor, the sick, the outcast and the sinner.

You shared, you healed, you embraced, you forgave;

And wherever there is poverty, sickness or anguish, you are there in the midst.

In hospitals, rehab centres, prisons, homeless shelters, broken homes, refugee camps, places of darkness, loneliness, depression and fear, your voice cries out, 'Father, I thirst.'

Wherever people are oppressed, wherever your children suffer, you weep with them. Wherever there is deprivation it is you who are deprived.

(MUSIC)

Eternal Father, whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord and King, we bring before you our prayers for the restoration and wholeness for all that you have created.

We pray for the church throughout the world, that it may extend your welcome and acceptance to people of every race and background. We pray that the Church may be united and strengthened by Christ himself who holds all things together and reigns supreme.

(MUSIC)

We pray for all who hold offices of privilege, power and influence, praying especially for all Members of Parliament, councillors, community leaders and church leaders, that all may govern and serve with the humility, wisdom, integrity and peace that you showed on earth.

(MUSIC)

We thank you that you have given Elizabeth our Queen a heart to serve her people. Sustain and strengthen her in devoted service that she might be a light and beacon of your love and grace to all nations.

(MUSIC)

We pray for all whose lives have been, and continue to be, devastated from the impact of the global pandemic. Bring comfort, strength, hope and healing.

We remember and give thanks for the work of the emergency services, the health service, all carers, key workers, scientists and volunteers. Protect, inspire and strengthen them by your Holy Spirit.

(MUSIC)

We pray for all those who suffer in any way thinking of the elderly, the housebound, those in hospital and hospices and all who suffer from loneliness, anxiety and depression. We pray that they will know the presence of your Son alongside them and the power of Christ the King within them bringing peace and healing. We pray that all who care for them will do so with compassion, patience and love. We pray for the recently departed and those whose anniversary falls at this time. Comfort all who mourn and bring light to their darkness.

(MUSIC)

Loving God our Father, help us to hear the call of Christ the King and walk in this world as citizens of your kingdom. When the suffering look at us, may we see your eyes. When the poor ask for comfort, may we see your face. When the hungry cry out, may we hear your voice so that one day we may hear you say, 'As you did it to one of these, you did it unto me.'

Amen.

As our Saviour taught us so 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.

Song: King of Kings, Majesty! (Sung by Laudate)

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.*

Jarrod Cooper © 1996 Sovereign Lifestyle Music

Blessing

As we come to the end of our worship together may I thank everyone who has generously given their time and talents to producing this service and of course thank you to you for joining us.

And so to our blessing,

Lord Jesus Christ, you humbled yourself in taking the form of a servant, and in obedience died on the cross for our salvation: give us the courage to follow you and to proclaim you as Lord and King, to the glory of God the Father.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all and all those who we love and pray for, this day and forever more.

Amen