

# starters for Sunday

## ***Reign of Christ the King***

**20 November 2016**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Nigel Robb, St Andrews Presbytery Clerk, for his thoughts on the Reign of Christ the King.

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## Quick Guide...

*Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.*

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

The Festival of Christ the King was a very late addition to the Christian liturgical calendar entering in the 20th Century. There has been debate over the reasons as to why it was introduced as a theme at the conclusion of the cycle of readings for Trinity or 'Kingdom tide' and a prelude the beginning of Advent.

The readings are not simple and open to a multitude of meanings and significance. Some are familiar from the pre-Easter period and the readings associated with Holy Week and the final days of the life of Jesus. They all focus on the issue of what kind of leader Jesus was and his characteristics in contrast to those often seen in the secular rulers and political masters of his time, the history of the Ancient Near Eastern World and our time. In the Festival of Christ the King, we look both back to the past and forward to God's time of anticipated action in Advent.

### [Jeremiah 23: 1-6](#)

This passage contains condemnation and castigation of those who do not care for God's people. This is followed with the expression of hope. God will raise up a true shepherd who will ensure the safety of God's people. God's promise is proclaimed that God will gather a remnant of God's people and appoint responsible leaders (true shepherds) and will provide, in God's own time and wisdom, a leader who will be faithful and wise in the line of King David.

There is both promise and judgment here. While there is debate among scholars about the exact time and the historical context of the prophet's words, they are agreed that this passage offers hope in time of challenge and possible despair.



### [Colossians 1: 11-20](#)

Perhaps this text derives from an early Christological hymn or poem. It may have been written to refute teaching, current in the Church of the Colossians or in the wider area, which threatened and undermined the supremacy of Christ.

The Kingdom of the Son arrives with the Parousia and the final conquest of death. The Kingdom is already somehow present in the universe and may suggest some kind of strong association of the Kingdom with the Church on earth. Yet there is a difference. The Church, at its best, is the place where Christ's true identity or Kingship is recognised, where the kingdom has begun to operate. It is not, however, the Kingdom. It is the setting in which reconciliation and peace may be at work so that they can extend into the wider world

The passage asserts the characteristics which, in theological reflection, substantiate or support the identity of Christ in his true humanity and divinity as outlined and claimed in the later Creeds.

The author presents Jesus Christ as the Creator and redeemer of all, ruler of the visible and invisible universe. Supremely the passage proclaims that Jesus Christ is the one who affects reconciliation with God. God is manifested in the life of Jesus Christ. It is Christ who lives and reigns and gives us hope. This is a message to meet the helplessness and fear in the world today.

### [Luke 23: 33-43](#)

In this dramatic account we are challenged by Luke to see the true nature of Christ's Kingship. There may be reference here or echoes in this to the Temptation narrative (Luke 4: 1-11). Here Jesus could save (as tempted by Satan) himself, and chose another way to be a different kind of king.

Luke writes in a manner reminiscent of a historian, brief, to the point and focuses on Jesus, not the reactions of those who follow him. There is clarity in the account, including factual essentials. Jesus does not save himself, but saves the criminal next to him.

The supposedly repentant (or recognising) thief sees God as vindicating Jesus and bringing him to his proper place. There may be debate over whether the thief was repentant or not – all we hear is his plea to Jesus and his recognition of the righteousness of Jesus.



Nowhere else is the term 'Paradise' used of the realm where God dwells. It indicates a state of rest and repose, rather than final reward. The word is technically drawn from the Persian term for a luxuriant fertile royal garden. Probably it hints here at the renewal of the Garden of Eden. Paradise was also known as the 'abode of the religious dead'.

The recognising thief appears to be promised by Jesus some share in his repose. It may not guarantee entrance into the Kingdom in all its fullness.

The scene is very familiar to most Christian congregations. Familiarity may dull our awareness of its uniqueness and powerful message. It is a scene dramatically unfolded by Luke through his dexterous use of material to enrich his composition (drawn mainly from the Gospel of Mark, but altered and added to significantly)

Luke presents or edits the scene giving the taunts of the enemies of Jesus into the mouths of the rulers and the soldiers and one of the criminals. In Luke's account, the people become onlookers rather than participants.

The recognising criminal speaks to his fellow criminal and then to Jesus. The whole scene is portrayed by Luke as full of pathos, drama and emotion.

In Luke, unlike the other Gospel narrative of the death of Jesus, Jesus does not die alone. A bond of compassion and solidarity exists to the very end, and we see the scene through the eyes of a criminal.

The power of the story is often reduced by our familiarity. The concept of crucifixion was a major factor in subduing rebellion through the Roman Empire. No Roman citizen could be crucified. This is why Cicero castigates Verres in his speeches of prosecution because he used this form of punishment in Sicily.

There is real and terrible agony in someone, often for days, hanging from a cross as he slowly dies of asphyxiation. Eventually the intercostal muscles and the diaphragm are so weakened that the condemned person expires. Those lucky enough to have their legs broken would die more quickly as there would be less support for breathing.

There was a social stigma associated with such a death. It implied or stated that the person had been placed beyond the conventional limits of society. The person was socially non-existent.



Many corpses, therefore, were left hanging on crosses as food for birds of prey. Into this, Luke casts the death of Jesus as a profoundly moving human scene.

## Sermon Ideas

The passage for Luke 23 offers a number of approaches

1. 'The people stood by watching'. Some were not his accusers. They are like us and we all have visited museums over the years to look at religious art and, in particular, the representation of the crucifixion.

There were others there who watched – the priestly plotters, the religious hierarchy, the criminals, the soldiers. The echoes of the temptation narrative in Luke are clearly here and we are tempted by the same kind of temptations in our lives.

Jesus' death as King of the Jews represented a false charge. It alleges he was acting for himself, and not acting on God's behalf. The thief sees through the mockery and perceives this as the judgment of the world by God.

2. The recognising or penitent thief. There is no offer to make amends for his deeds. No promise of goodness. There is no confession or echo of the Apostles Creed. Instead it is a claim for grace, 'remember me in my hour of need'. There is a central theme in Luke here of forgiveness. Forgiveness is as complex matter. It could be argued that the thief makes no conscious deliberate act of repentance.

We might refer to the novel by Dostoevsky Crime and Punishment. The characters there are not admirable or sinless. In fact they are all great sinners: a murderer, abusive alcoholic father and a woman forced into prostitution. In the novel they are emphasised as recipients of God's grace. A grace that is costly, far reaching revolutionary grace.

The introduction of the theme of Paradise by Luke with the added edge of 'today' seems to heighten the core of Christian hope which is trust in Jesus, the beloved of God. This is a drama of repentance (to some) in Luke which characterises the whole of the Gospel of Luke.



3. The symbolism of two is powerful in Luke. There is choice for all human beings in Luke's approach. He demonstrates this by many examples in his account, including in his Gospel the stories of the Pharisee and the Publican, the two sons, two sisters, Mary and Martha, the prodigal and his brother, the Rich man and Lazarus. Luke teaches us not to rely our own goodness. All have choices according to Luke. The two thieves have choices here.

The first thief joins the mockers and persecutors of Jesus, while the other defends the righteousness of Jesus as the wronged one who suffers unjustifiably. The story of the Gospel in Luke may be summed up as the possibility of receiving unmerited grace. The invitation to respond to God in Jesus Christ and receive the gift of grace not as a reward but as a promise that is full and freeing. Here we are exhorted not to rely our own merit or actions, but on grace alone.

## Prayers

### Call to Worship

God is our shepherd.

God never leaves us without leadership or guidance.

God continually creates, protects and watches over us.

In this moment we are invited to acknowledge God's loving care of each of us, listen for God's word of encouragement and call, even on difficult or depressing days and God's desire for our complete and unequivocal faithfulness to God's leading.

Come let us worship God.

### Approach

O God, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep,

You know each of us well, love us deeply and are able to help us in an enormous variety of ways.

We are humbled by our awareness of your profound concern and interest in our petty concerns and worries, and your keen interest in our welfare.

Given so much greatness and variety, we come anticipating a wider perspective of your grace and power.



**Confession**

We know your mercy for the penitent, O loving God.

Let us experience it once again as we place the record of our past week before you.

We recall our lack of respect for others and those set in authority over us.

We acknowledge our abuse and neglect of our particular talents and gifts

We have lived as if the world was in our control and needed no reference from you

We have failed to measure up to the standard of behaviour intended for those who claim to be your disciples

Our example has not influenced the world for good

In certain ways we have lived as if the earth and life upon it is the limit of our horizon and have disregarded your encouragement to strive forward and achieve the goal of true maturity

Hear us O God, as in silence we now confess our individual sin before you.

**Petition**

Good shepherd,

Prod us awake to the opportunities and invitations you lay before us.

Give us magnanimity in defeat and denial, so that we may trust you rather than our own wisdom and wit.

Give to those who lead, the loyalty and support they deserve and to those who follow, willing spirits and a sense of purpose in their part of your plan for this world.

**Thanksgiving**

Almighty God,

We give you thanks for all who have given their lives and talents in the eservice of others, and those whose religious zeal, commitment to truth, leadership ability and qualities of service have enabled others to live more freely and fully and brought new harmony and understanding into the world.

We praise you for those who can let another take the lead where appropriate; who know how to retire gracefully,



and encourage others by their graciousness and concern for the good of the community rather than their own selfish interest and reputation.

For all who have lifted the standards of behaviour,  
the moral and ethical codes,  
and have been dissatisfied with slovenly or slapdash efforts  
and careless attitudes to important tasks, we glorify your name.

Especially for Jesus Christ,  
we are grateful, for his life and example which pushes out our limited horizons of our thinking  
and challenges our system of values and call us upward and onward.

### **Intercession**

Gracious God,  
We know we are tenants of this good earth,  
entrusted through your grace with its abundance and harvest.

Strengthen our resolve to be worthy of your covenant with us,  
and make us more willing to hear, to obey, to act in protection and production of the fruit of  
your kingdom of love.

Fill the leaders of our nation, and all nations,  
with a healthy respect for the dignity of human life,  
the worth of the individual and the need to consider the micro issues as well and the macro  
issues in politics and society.

Sustain those with special talents – of laughter, healing, teaching, leadership, parenting,  
production of food and necessities of life –  
and encourage them to see you as the source of all their gifts.

Accept, we pray, your simple and single talented children,  
with their particular hopes and promise, so that they may continue to work in their faithful way  
for the growth of love and cooperation, mutual dependence and trust.





Startle the wavering and the tempted,  
the unsure and the procrastinating with a sharp sense of your interest and your demands of care upon them.

Refresh the weary and war torn, the oppressed and the suffering  
with unexpected and unlimited mercies.

Motivate the hearts of compassionate men and women  
to respond to the cries of the hungry, and the plight of the undernourished.

Shake the complacent out of their stupor of self-satisfaction  
and grab their attention and motivate them to action on behalf of those with no 'clout',  
no political weight and no means of being heard for themselves.

Give patience to those who labour to alter the ideas of society  
and change old patterns of the increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

Direct and embolden those who grapple with the problems of insufficient shelter  
and inadequate clothing, the lack of simple resources in educations,  
and the abuses of justice and mercy which occur even in our own land.

Burn into those who have slumped into idle lethargy and lukewarm apathy  
with a boldness to correct, eradicate  
and transform the wrongs which create the cages of rejection and isolation for those whose life  
styles and personal problems or handicaps make them misfits.

Cleanse the Church from its eagerness to be popular,  
to be readily accepted by the world,  
to be silent on the controversial issues  
and participate in the destruction and rejection of goodness, truth and love.

Stir the councils of the Church with holy rage against the misuse of the Gospel  
and the ecclesiastical ghetto mentality which threatens to overwhelm the proclamation of your  
love.



Guide the Church when it enters the deep waters of challenging the social structure and calls for an end of action which discriminates and criminalise the poor and the powerless. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.



In addition to the above prayers, prepared by our contributor, other prayers may be found in *People of the Way* which is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It was also the theme for Heart and Soul 2016. *People of the Way* is available from [St Andrew Press](#).

## Musical Suggestions

CH4 15	The Lord is my shepherd, I'll not want
CH4 392	When I survey the wondrous cross
CH4 32	O send thy light forth and thy truth
CH4 511	Your hand Of God has guided
CH4 462	The King of Love my shepherd is
CH4 449	Rejoice the Lord is King
CH4 365	Ride on! Ride on in majesty
CH4 166	Lord of all hopefulness
CH4 702	Lord in Love and perfect wisdom
CH4 374	From heaven you came, helpless babe
CH4 378	Praise to the holiest in the height
CH4 381	Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended?
CH4 382	O sacred Head! Sore wounded
CH4 385	Here hangs a man discarded
CH4 397	In the cross of Christ I glory
CH4 403	Were you there when they crucified my Lord
CH4 405	We sing the praise of him who died



## Additional Resources

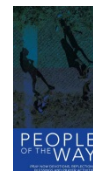
### Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

### Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [People of the Way](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



### Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

### Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

### Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

*The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Nigel Robb for providing us with this Sunday's material.*

*Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.*

