

## Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Christ the King

### Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – 22 November 2020

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Revd Professor Charlotte Methuen, Professor of Ecclesiastical History, University of Glasgow, Assistant Priest, St Margaret Newlands, SEC, for her thoughts on the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

“We may not be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.”

*National Worship Team*

As the restrictions on our ability to meet in groups continue and uncertainty about access to church buildings extends through the autumn and into winter, worship leaders continue to deliver their services both online and offline.

We can help to facilitate participation from the whole congregation by exploring imaginative approaches to our use of technology in the service in ways that suit both physical gatherings and video-conference style settings, such as:

- Opening and closing moments of worship that help people mark out a time set apart with God
- Introducing various parts of the worship service to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each one (framing)
- Enabling conversations or prayers in breakout groups
- Holding spaces that allow people to go deeper in worship
- Using the chat function and microphone settings to allow people to actively participate in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship

#### Useful links:

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

Useful tips for creating and leading worship online can be found [here](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

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## Introduction

Christ the King Sunday is the final Sunday in the Church's year. In German churches this Sunday is called *Ewigkeitssonntag* – eternity Sunday. The lectionary over the past few weeks has given us visions of end times, and this theme will be picked up again in our Advent readings which invite us to prepare, not only for the incarnation, but also for the Christ's second coming.

The feast of Christ the King was first marked in 1925, just a few years after the end of the First World War, in a time of rising totalitarianism. Pope Pius XI was deeply concerned about the state of the world; worried (as he said in the encyclical that established the feast) that “the majority of men had thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives; that these had no place either in private affairs or in politics: and ... that as long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of our Saviour, there would be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations.”[1] Christ the King was intended to assert the power of Christ in the world, over the power of war, over the power of totalitarianism.

Pius XII rather warped this vision by signing concordats with Mussolini and Hitler a few years later, but the original prophetic vision is important. The bringing of the world into the order of God transcends political vision and political authority. But that does not mean that this is an otherworldly vision, and our readings this week remind us of how we prepare for the kingdom of God through our actions in this world. Recognising Christ's kingship is also about responding to injustice and also about speaking out against the ways in which authority supports injustice.

### [Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24](#)

Ezekiel was prophesying at a time of great upheaval and uncertainty for the people of Israel. Trapped in exile in Babylon (Mesopotamia), he heard from afar the news of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. His prophecies open with the oracles against Judah, identifying the falling away from God's commandments which has led to this destruction. Then Ezekiel is told by God that his beloved wife, the “delight of [his] eyes,” will die, but that he may not mourn her, just as the people of Israel are not to mourn the temple (Ezekiel 24). The other nations also fall under God's judgment, expressed in Ezekiel's oracles against the nations. Today's passage follows on from these pronouncements of judgment against Israel and the other nations, to speak of redemptive hope. God is like a shepherd who will seek out the scattered sheep and bring them to good pasture, tending to them, and binding up their wounds. Ezekiel's prophecy promises God's care for the people of Israel, but this is also a prophecy of redemption to all those beloved of God, also amongst the other nations.

God's promise includes an element of judgment. God's care is for the lost, the strayed, the injured, and the weak. God will destroy the fat and the strong. Here the missing verses from this lectionary reading appear crucial. The fat and the strong including those who take what they need from the green pasture, or the fresh water, but despoil and contaminate what they do not need so that no-one else can benefit from it. God condemns this mean-hearted behaviour, favouring the lean sheep over the fat sheep that had pushed them aside and deprived them. We may like to believe that we are the lean sheep, but this passage calls us to examine our lives – and our lifestyles – and assess honestly those places where it is we who are the fat sheep, pushing the lean sheep out of our way, condemning the lean sheep to poverty or leaving them with ruined resources.

### [Psalm 100](#) or [Psalm 95:1-7a](#)

Both psalms are psalms of praise. Either would form an effective call to worship, and Psalm 95, commonly known as the Venite (Come!), is used as such in the Anglican/Episcopalian order for Morning Prayer. Psalm 97 is a hymn to God the creator which implicitly affirms the place of humankind in that creation: "In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed." Both psalms affirm that in giving praise to God we are also affirming our loyalty to God, recognising that we belong to God. We affirm "we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture" (Ps 100). This relationship between God and God's people is reciprocal: "For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps 97). Both psalms pick up on the language of Ezekiel's prophecy: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep." But both also emphasise that it is God, and not to any other ruler, to whom the believer owes allegiance.

### [Ephesians 1:15-23](#)

Paul's letter to the Ephesians, also read at the Ascension, shows us Christ seated at God's 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." All things are subject to Christ. This is Christ the king. This is a king who wants thoughtful subjects, who does not require blind obedience but gives "a spirit of wisdom and revelation." And this is also a king who cares about how others are treated. Paul affirms the Ephesians' "faith in the Lord Jesus" but also their "love towards all the saints."

Garrett Andrew writes that this passage "is rooted in the hope that God will one day bring forth something so completely new that this world of dividing walls (Eph 2:11-14), this

world of the broken down and beat up, this world of days ‘when hope unborn had died’ (James Weldon Johnson, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*), will come to an end.”[2] Although we look forward to that time, Andrew believes, “The church is not a storage house for those passing through this life while waiting for their pie in the sky, or for that moment of some strange pre- or post-millennialist tribulation. It is a place of those called by God for the greater good.”[2]

Recognising Christ’s place at God’s right hand is not a question of accepting things the way they are. When we receive wisdom and revelation we will see this world differently, not only the world to come. For Andrew, “Christ’s place of authority in the created order is the foundation for all fights against injustice.”[2] He asks: “Does our love for all the saints inspire others to thank God? Do we have the eyes of the heart that allow us to know the hope to which we have been called?”[2] Paul’s letter to the Ephesians challenges to consider how our faith permeates our lives and our actions, speaking to those around us of God’s love for the world.

### [Matthew 25:31-46](#)

The passage from Matthew’s gospel emphasises that this greater good is not only about our love for the “the saints”, that is the other believers, but also about how we treat the other people we encounter. At this moment of judgment, it is clear that how we have treated others does matter. The affirmation of those who have fed the hungry, given the thirsty something to drink, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked and visited the captive resonates with the third and fourth of the Anglican Communion’s Five Marks of Mission, also adopted by the Church of Scotland:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom  
To teach, baptise and nurture new believers  
To respond to human need by loving service  
To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation  
To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth  
[3]

What we do matters, but what Matthew is proposing here should not be understood as some kind of works righteousness. What is striking in the conversation between Jesus and those who did – or did not – succour those around them, is that they do not know. “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?” they ask. Or for the others, when was it that they did not? These are works of neighbourly love done – or not done – not with the intention of putting oneself right with God, or earning God’s favour, but done – or not done – because of the person’s fundamental attitude towards the world. They are, in the language of Reformation theology, not works intended to earn justification, but the fruits of justification, the outpouring of the believer’s love of God.

[1] Encyclical “Quas Primas”, online at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_11121925\\_quas-primas\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_11121925_quas-primas_en.html) (accessed 15 July 2020).

[2] Garrett Andrew, “Ephesians 1:15–23,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68 (2014), 190-191.

[3] Five Marks of Mission, online at: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx> (accessed 15 July 2020).

## Sermon ideas

Ezekiel speaks into a time of great uncertainty, and we have been experiencing exactly that ourselves. There is much in Ezekiel’s prophecy that prompts questions about how people have responded to the crisis. The verses missing from the lectionary reading may be particularly pertinent in considering our responsibility to one another, both locally and globally.

Pius XI’s explanation for the establishing of the feast of Christ the King and Garrett Andrew’s reading of Ephesians both challenge us to reflect on the supreme powers in our own lives. These questions can be brought into conversation also with the psalms: what does it mean to worship God? What are we doing when we gather for worship and praise?

Matthew’s gospel is an explicit call to consider our own attitudes to those in need. A helpful approach to this passage might be through the prayer of Teresa of Avila (1515-82):

“Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world; yours are the feet with which he walks to do good; yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.”

Congregations might be encouraged to discuss how the congregation as a whole, and its members as individuals, are engaged with Christ’s mission to the world. Presentations of

projects could be given. How are the five marks of mission to be held in balance in the congregation's life?

Considering Christ the King as the end of church's year invites a retrospective which could be tied into the theme of service and prophetic engagement.

## Prayers

My Anglican/Episcopalian tradition does not expect (or allow) me to write liturgical prayers, and I find this aspect of the brief the most difficult. I have based my prayers on the readings and on resources available elsewhere. All prayers will need to be adapted to take account of the situation in late November.

### Approach to God – based on Psalm 97

Leader: Come, let us sing to the Lord;

**All: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!**

Leader: Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

**All: let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!**

Leader: For the Lord is a great God,

**All: and a great King above all gods.**

Leader: In his hand are the depths of the earth;

**All: the heights of the mountains are his also.**

Leader: The sea is his, for he made it,

**All: and the dry land, which his hands have formed.**

Leader: Come, let us worship and bow down,

**All: let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!**

Leader: For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture,

**All: and the sheep of his hand.**

Leader: Come let us listen to his voice!

**Thanksgiving** – based on Psalm 100

Let us today worship the Lord with gladness  
and come into his presence with singing.  
Let us know that the Lord is God.

It is God who made us; and we belong to God;  
we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture.

Let us enter God's gates with thanksgiving,  
and God's courts with praise,  
giving thanks to God,  
blessing God's name.  
Let us give thanks to God for God's goodness,  
for God's steadfast love which endures for ever,  
for God's faithfulness to all generations.  
Let us give thanks for all the gifts we receive  
Amen

**Confession**

You, God, are our one and only King.  
We beg Your forgiveness for the other "kings" that we kneel before:  
money...  
power...  
gossip...  
self-righteousness...  
racial privilege...

We beg Your forgiveness, we who are broken and torn apart  
by our own doings and un-doings.

Guide us to be Your servants.  
Lead us to trust in You as the only king we need.  
Direct our faith in Your sovereign power  
as we strive to follow Your Son,  
through the power of Your Holy Spirit, we pray  
Amen

Permission is given for use in congregational worship with the following accreditation  
"Written by Rev. Stephen M. Fearing" ([www.stephenmfearing.com](http://www.stephenmfearing.com))

**Intercessions** – based on the Church of England’s [\*Times and Seasons, H1\*](#)

Leader: We pray for the coming of God’s kingdom.  
You sent Your Son to bring good news to the poor,  
sight to the blind,  
freedom to captives  
and salvation to Your people:  
anoint us with Your Spirit;  
rouse us to work in His name.  
Loving God, by Your Spirit

**All: bring in Your kingdom.**

Leader: Send us to bring help to the poor  
and freedom to the oppressed.  
Loving God, by Your Spirit

**All: bring in Your kingdom.**

Leader: Send us to speak out  
and proclaim Your justice in the world.  
Loving God, by Your Spirit

**All: bring in Your kingdom.**

Leader: Send us to tell the world  
the good news of Your healing love.  
Loving God, by Your Spirit

**All: bring in Your kingdom.**

Leader: Send us to those who mourn,  
to bring joy and gladness instead of grief.  
Loving God, by Your Spirit

**All: bring in Your kingdom.**

Leader: Send us to proclaim that the time is here  
for You to save Your people.  
Loving God, by Your Spirit

**All: bring in Your kingdom.**

Leader: Lord of the Church,  
hear our prayer,  
and make us one in mind and heart  
to serve You in Christ our Lord

**All: Amen**

**Blessing** – based on the five marks of mission

May we go forth to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;  
May we be always willing to teach, baptise and nurture new believers;  
May we in our daily lives respond to human need by loving service;  
May we have the courage to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge  
violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation  
May we join together to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and  
renew the life of the earth.  
And the blessing of God, who creates, redeems and sustains us, be with us always as we  
share in God's mission to the world.

**Amen**

## **Alternative Material**

This material has been supplied by kind permission of Spill the Beans. It can be adapted in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship both online and offline.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

## **Bible notes**

### **Infusing goodness – [Matthew 25:31-46](#)**

'One bad apple spoils the whole barrel,' so says the old proverb. No doubt we all know that experience of digging into the fruit bowl in the kitchen to find that one mouldy, rotten piece of fruit has affected all the others around it. How we wish we had separated that one bad piece out earlier...

This Sunday we have the famous story of 'separating the sheep from the goats.' Although originating in the Bible this has become a term that has also slipped into modern parlance

to describe the process of separation of one from another. The good separated from the bad.

This wasn't so much a story that Jesus told—like the parables—it was more of a teaching discourse.

There is a lot of repetition in the text. Four times Jesus says: When did we see you naked... etc. The repeated litany suggests that this was something that needed to be heard over and over again.

Perhaps it is the case that both the blessed and the cursed needed it repeated to them twice over.

Blessed are those who fed the hungry, gave the thirsty something to drink, welcomed the stranger, took care of the ill and visited the prisoner. In their kindnesses they ministered to Christ himself. Cursed are those who did not, who turned their back on Christ in the guise of the needy.

When each and every person is made in the image of God, then that good part in us that convicts us to action to encourage, to support, to build up others is God's image in us shining through. Each time we deny another person, we not only refuse to allow God's image to shine through our actions, but we also tragically fail to recognise the image of God in that other person. This is a sinful act, but all too often seen when people seek to demean others.

Jesus' condemnation of those who did not reach out to people in need is not merely a condemnation of their actions, bad as those were. It is also about the consequences of their actions, particularly the effect that those actions have on others.

There is the sense, in the passage, that as those who are blessed, ministered to the needy, their actions encouraged others to stretch out a helping hand. It was contagious compassion.

While those who withheld kindness laid a common path for the community surrounding them towards hostility, fear and isolation.

That is the reality.

Our actions change others—for good or ill—not just those we might help, but those who witness our reaching out or holding back.

Writing these notes in the week following the riots that afflicted numerous cities in England during August 2011, and as contemporary social networking sites evidence, we recognise folk can be incited to all manner of actions. Sometimes evil becomes normalised because of its prevalence exemplified by others.

But the same is true of positive forces: folk can be swept along and encouraged to perform helpful actions, making a difference in communities because of the example of others.

Often, in our church communities, we do not take sufficient cognisance of this. We forget how significant we can be in influencing each other and the communities we serve.

No matter how much we mourn the loss of the church's place in society, it is clear that there is still an important element of interest in the actions that we promote and undertake as a community of Christians.

Within and without the church we are called to show kindness. Community is sharing together and influencing each other. That is worth celebrating for it is living out the image of God in us, and recognises Christ as King in our lives.

### **Retelling for young people**

Jesus said, "There are those who help other people, and there are those who don't.

"Those who help other people, are helping me, and those who don't help other people, are hurting me."

When Jesus said these words, some people replied, "When have we been helping you? We didn't know we were doing it."

Jesus said, "That's the best way to help me, when you don't know you are doing it."

Jesus went on: "Everyone who helps someone who is hungry is helping me because I am hungry too.

"Everyone who gives someone a drink when they are thirsty is helping me because I get thirsty too.

"Everyone who welcomes someone who is lonely welcomes me because I get lonely too.

"Everyone who visits those who are sick visits me too because I can get sick sometimes too.

“Whenever you help others, you help me.”

What other ways have we been helping Jesus and didn't know it?

## Activities

### Gathering

Play some reflective music as different symbols of 'un-sovereignty' are brought in, such as a crown of thorns, a purple cloth, a cross, bread and wine, water.

### Montage

*You will need: large card sheet, leaflets and magazine from organisations that care for others, scissors, glue, pens.*

Celebrate how people are cared for in your community by picking up leaflets about caring organisations and gathering photographs of people caring from others from newspapers, church magazines etc.

Cut out large letters to form words 'celebrating caring' and cut pictures to fit into letters. This montage can be displayed in your building for all to see.

### Cards

*You will need: A5 card, stickers, colouring pens, tissue paper, ribbon, etc., glue.*

Provide children with A5 card and materials to decorate card and 'thinking of you' stickers available from craft shops or online.

Ask the children to make cards that will be sent out with the church flowers to someone who is unwell, or unable to come to church, over the next few weeks and talk about different and simple ways we can care for others.

### Reflection – Sheep and Goats

Sheep and goats—  
are they really so different?  
How can we tell?  
How would we know?  
And which are we?  
Will we find ourselves  
on the right side or the left?

With the blessed or the cursed?  
What separates us and how would we fare?

A cup of cold water,  
a scrap of food,  
some hand-me-downs we can spare;  
these separate us, sheep from goats.  
Offering friendship,  
or a visit to the sick;  
for these trifles,  
God calls us blessed,  
by these trifles  
God separates the sheep from the goats.

## **Prayers**

### **Call to worship**

A throne for Christ the King,  
Or a pavement  
with the lonely and homeless.

A court for our God,  
Or a food queue with the down-and-outs.

A crown for our Saviour,  
Or a twist of thorns shaped in mockery.

A robe for our Lord,  
Or a blanket wound round  
A quiet doorway sleeper.

A banquet for our Redeemer,  
Or a broken loaf, shared at a broken table  
in a broken world.

A jewelled goblet for the use of Christ,  
or a bowl of water  
for Christ to wash the feet of others.

It is a dull glory,  
a tarnished grandeur,  
but it is the reign of grace.  
This is our God.

**OR**

**Affirmation**

*This affirmation can be used as a call to worship, getting gradually louder with each line.*

Christ is King!  
**Christ is King!**

Christ is King!  
**Christ is King!**

Christ is King!  
In our worship,  
**CHRIST IS KING!**

God as we hail you today,  
Christ the King,  
we ponder the kingly image  
that you portray:  
a hungry king,  
a thirsty king,  
a king bedraggled,  
homeless,  
sitting on our kerbsides,  
ignored by your subjects.

Quietly you wait for us to notice  
and take action:  
to lift you out of the gutter,  
to clothe you

and feed you  
and care for you.

You do not cry out,  
you simply wait and hope.

Christ the King,  
as your hopes are dashed time and again,  
awaken us and shake us  
out of our complacency  
by your quiet, persistent loving.

May we reach out to you  
by reaching out to each other  
and to those who live in the gutters  
in our neighbourhoods.

Help us to do this  
without seeking recognition  
but simply because we can do no other.

### **Sending**

This is the reign of Christ,  
let us choose to trust Christ,  
not with the glories of worldly sovereignty  
but in heaven's idea of the servant.

Let us go  
and come back soon,  
as all the glories of Christ  
are found in the long hopes of the prophets  
and an empty stable waiting,  
somewhere.

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## Musical suggestions

Our online music resource is [here](#): you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship.

- CH4 63 – “All People that on earth do dwell” – the traditional metrical versions of Psalm 100 (The Old Hundredth) from the Scottish Psalter. A more modern translation by James Quinn, with a lovely melody is CH4 64 “Sing all creation, sing to God in gladness.”
- CH4 65 – “Jubilate, everybody” – is also based on Psalm 100. Any or all of these would work as an opening hymn of praise.
- CH4 360 – “Jesus Christ is waiting” or CH4 694 – “Brother, sister, let me serve you” – are both prayers that we may participate in Christ’s prophetic and healing ministry. The first is more focused on aligning ourselves with Christ, the latter on the service of neighbour. Or sing CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations” – Fred Kaan’s call to a life of justice and peace.
- CH4 436 – “Christ triumphant, ever reigning” – a hymn of praise to Christ the King. A less explicitly christological option would be CH4 128 “How shall I sing that majesty”. A more contemporary option would be CH4 374 “From heaven you came helpless babe” (The Servant King).
- CH4 462 – “The King of Love my shepherd is” or CH4 14-16 – different settings of “The Lord is my shepherd” – pick up on the shepherding theme in the reading from Ezekiel.
- CH4 804 – “You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace” – this could be a good option for a closing hymn, pointing towards the Advent message of the transformation of the natural world and rejoicing at the coming of the Messiah.

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