

Christ the King Sunday – Year A

Sunday 26 November 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Rosie Frew, Minister of Bowden and Melrose Parish Church, for her thoughts on Christ the King Sunday.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all 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.

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Introduction

Christ the King Sunday was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 on the last Sunday in October, and has been observed on the last Sunday before Advent since 1970; the climax and conclusion of the Church's liturgical journey through the life of Christ. Next Sunday sees the start of Advent and the beginning of a new church year.

In a year when we've witnessed the Coronation of a king, the Kingship of Christ is something you may have touched on already in worship. It certainly provides a very recent shared experience to reflect upon.

There are different ways to tackle this Sunday – plenty of sheep and goats, and a lot of comparison between the kings and kingdoms of earth and Christ the King and the Kingdom of God. The upside-down nature of Christ's Kingship.

By way of introduction, I love the story from the 16th century of Bishop Hugh Latimer, leader, reformer (and martyr) of the Church in England. One Sunday morning he entered his pulpit and looked out to see King Henry VIII in the congregation. He knew that what he had to say that day would not go down well with King Henry. He thought for a moment and then said to himself, but out loud for all to hear, "Latimer, be careful what you say today; King Henry is here." He thought for a moment longer and again said to himself, but aloud so others could hear, "Latimer, be careful what you say today; the King of kings is here."

In Scotland, in a similar vein, the reformer Andrew Melville made this statement to King James VI: "Sirrah, ye are God's silly vassal; there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of the commonwealth; and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, not a lord, not a head, but a member."

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

Ezekiel was a priest, exiled to Babylon in 597BC. In his fifth year of exile, when he was 30, he was called to be a prophet, a spokesperson for God. For more than 20 years he served as a prophet among the exiles where 'he recounted visions, expounded allegories and propounded parables.' (Peter C Craigie).

By chapter 34 Jerusalem has fallen and Ezekiel is turning his attention to the 'shepherds of Israel' (v2), its rulers, those entrusted with the care of the flock. The chapter begins with a condemnation of these shepherds for their failure. In our passage God has assumed the role

of the good shepherd and brings hope to the exiles of a return to their own land. As we read verses 11-16 we hear echoes of Psalm 23 and the words and actions of Jesus are brought to mind: I will seek out my sheep; I will rescue them; I will feed them; I will make them lie down; I will seek the lost; I will bring back the strayed; I will bind up the injured; I will strengthen the weak.

Although the great shepherd brings the flock to a place of safety, verses 20-24 speak of judgment between the sheep and between sheep and goats; again reminding us of the words of Jesus in our parable from Matthew's gospel – a judgment on those who have ignored the weak and people on the margins.

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

We are given a choice here. There's a similarity between the two psalms. Both serve as wonderful calls to worship (or opening hymns). Both urge us to sing with joy, give thanks and celebrate. Both acknowledge the greatness of God, the King of all Creation. Both speak of the Creator God, our creator – *he made us; we are his; his people; his sheep; the flock under his care*. Again, that image of God the good shepherd. However, as our other scripture readings remind us, being one of God's sheep comes with responsibilities.

[Ephesians 1:15-23](#)

On this Christ the King Sunday, Paul reminds us of the power of God in raising Christ, and seating Him at God's right hand in the heavenly realm, "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" (v21). What a picture of Kingship! As we reflect on today's gospel reading, this glorious Christ is the same one we meet and serve in the presence of human suffering.

[Matthew 25:31-46](#)

The parable of the sheep and the goats is well known, and the message is clear: be a sheep not a goat! It is within your power to be one or the other. Every moment that you encounter human suffering you are in the presence of the Lord.

Sermon ideas

Not all gatherings include a sermon; people engage with scripture in different ways so these questions could also be used to frame a conversation in groups, Q&As, or other ways to approach scripture and share learning. There may be questions within each passage of exegesis that you can consider as you prepare your sermon.

Some ideas and questions you might like to explore:

- The Shepherd King. We love the imagery of being loved and cared for by the shepherd, but being one of His sheep comes with responsibilities.
- Sheep and goats – being a sheep and not a goat! What does this mean in our world today? Where do we see need around us? What do we / can we do?
- Christ the King: An upside-down king – not quite what we expect. Again, what does this mean for us?
- Christ the King: the challenge – Will you have Jesus Christ to be your King?
- When we think of a King what do we think of? Crown, jewels, robes, palaces, riches, servants... Christ the King is a very different kind of king. If Jesus Christ is our King how do we serve him? What does he expect of us?
- This poem, written by Maurice Cox is one I've returned to many times over the years. It presents a challenge: will you have Jesus Christ to be your King? This Upside-down King, this Servant King. Will you let Him reign in your life? Will you serve the Servant King? Will His values be your values? His concerns your concerns?

The King (*Maurice Cox: from Jesus is Alive (pp123-4), the Kairos Group, first published 1972*)

A king ? They call Him King! Is homage due
To such a one? A king? Can it be true?
The lowly Jew, born in far Bethlehem?
Men from all nations say He died for them
And rose from Death, to hold a heavenly sway.
To which all men must bow the knee some day.

The king? He's not our king! The Jews once cried.
Away with Him! Let Him be crucified!
His claim is false. He is no king of Jews.
Away with Him! Kill! Crucify! We choose
Barabbas. So a robber goes out free,
While Jesus Christ is led to Calvary.

The king? If King of Heaven, had He no power
To stay the surging evil of that hour?
He had - but out He went, and there He died
That sinners might be cleansed and justified,
Brought back to God. The wonder of this thing -
A pauper's pardon purchased by a King!

The King. Today mankind still turns Him down,
Still scourges, spits and plaits a thorny crown,
Still mocks His precious Name, still treads roughshod
Upon His claims - We have no time for God!
And so the royal Saviour is denied
The souls for whom He once was crucified.

The King. Creator of all living things;
The Lord of Hosts; the mighty King of Kings;
The conqueror of Death; the Perfect One;
The Judge of all the Earth; God's Only Son;
The Christ of God is King! No power is known
To match in majesty His Heavenly Throne.

The King. Today this question comes anew –
Will you have Jesus to reign over you?
His hands and feet are pierced, His brow is scarred
But there is Glory in that face once marred.
He reigns! His claims come ringing, challenging –
Will you have Jesus Christ to be your King?

Will you have Jesus Christ to be your King?

It is fairly easy to praise and glorify the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, reigning in heaven, reigning in glory. It is fairly easy to celebrate Christ's birth in Bethlehem, His triumph over

death and ascension to heaven. It is a bit harder to read the Gospels and hear His words and hear of His actions. It is harder still to serve Christ in this world of contrasts – rich and poor, strong and weak, healthy and sick, haves and have-nots, at war and at peace. This world of hunger and thirst, strangers and prisoners, sick and naked.

That's our challenge. For Christ's is the world in which we move. These are the folk we are summoned to love.

Will you have Jesus Christ to be your King?

Prayers

Call to worship – Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;

Come into God's presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;

We are God's people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to God, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;

God's steadfast love endures for ever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

Prayer of approach

Christ our King,

seated in the heavenly realm,

far above all rule and authority,

all power and dominion.

We worship and adore You.

Christ our King,

King of kings,

Lord of lords,

ruler of all.

We worship and adore You.

Christ our King,
You made us – we are Yours,
You love us – with a love that endures,
You care for us and protect us.

We worship and adore You.

Christ our King,
You were born in a stable,
You ate with sinners and tax collectors,
Your crown was of thorns.

We worship and adore You.

Prayer of confession

Christ our King
we come before You seeking forgiveness.

When we do not give You the honour due to You
Forgive us.

When we fail to understand Your Kingship
Forgive us.

When we see hunger and thirst,
but don't see You:
open our eyes, our hands and our hearts.

When we see loneliness and poverty,
but don't see You:
Open our eyes, our hands and our hearts.

When we see human frailty and suffering,
but don't see You:
**Open our eyes, our hands and our hearts
Amen.**

Prayer

Lord Jesus
You are our King
The Upside-down King
The Forever King
You love us and care for us
You reign in our hearts
You fill us with joy and happiness, hope and peace
You ask us to love You and serve You
by loving other people
and helping those in need.

Lord Jesus
You are our King
We are Your people
Now and always
Amen.

Prayer of thanksgiving

Prayer based on our reading from Ezekiel

Christ the King,
the Good Shepherd,
I thank You that
You searched for me,
You rescued me,
You look after me,
You feed me,
You tend me,
You bind me up when I am injured,
You strengthen me when I am weak.

Prayer for others

Use newspaper headlines from the past week particularly those that tie in with Matthew's gospel – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those needing clothes, the ill, those in prison. These can be used to form prayers that people can speak aloud or place at the front or somewhere to be read or seen by others.

Prayer based on the hymn, *A Touching Place* (CH4 724)

Lord Jesus,
You are a different kind of king
You are our king,
and You call us to be a different kind of people,
Your people.
Yours is the world in which we move;
Yours are the folk we're summoned to love;
Yours is the voice which calls us to care.

Help us, we pray, to show Your love
to the lost, the unloved, the strange,
the bereaved, the disheartened
Those who fear that their living is all in vain.

Help us, we pray, to show Your love
to the parents who've lost their child,
to those who have been abused
to the children abandoned, in care
to the weary who find no rest.

Help us, we pray, to show Your love
to those who feel confused by life
to those who are riddled with doubt
to those who are conscious of sin,
to those who cry in pain or disgrace

You are our king,
and You call us to be a different kind of people.
Help us, we pray
Amen.

Blessing

Go from this place to serve Christ the King with love and compassion.
Go from this place with open eyes, open hands and open hearts.
May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
go with you now and remain with you always,
Amen.

Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; 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. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

From the Psalms

- CH4 59 – “Oh, come and let us to the Lord” (Psalm 95)
- CH4 60 – “Come let us praise the Lord” (Psalm 95)
- CH4 63 – “All people that on earth do dwell” (Psalm 100)
- CH4 64 – “Sing all creation, sing to God with gladness” (Psalm 100)
- CH4 65 – “Jubilate, everybody” (Psalm 100)

Christ the King

- CH4 127 – “O worship the King, all glorious above”
- CH4 129 – “The Lord is King! Lift up your voice!”
- CH4 436 – “Christ triumphant, ever reigning”
- CH4 437 – “He is exalted”
- CH4 438 – “The Head that once was crowned with thorns”
- CH4 449 – “Rejoice! The Lord is King”
- CH4 548 – “At the name of Jesus”
- CH4 549 – “Crown him with many crowns”
- CH4 462 – “The King of Love my Shepherd is”

- MP 366 – “Jesus is King and I will extoll him”
- MP 454 – “Majesty”
- MP 790 – “You are the King of glory”
- MP 1000 – “King of Kings, majesty”

Serving Christ the King

- CH4 360 – “Jesus Christ is waiting”
- CH4 528 – “Make me a channel of your peace”
- CH4 543 – “Longing for light, we wait in darkness”
- CH4 544 – “When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?”
- CH4 724 – “Christ’s is the world in which we move”

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
Did it function well as a whole?
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 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](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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