

Sunday 22nd November 2020

Christ the King

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Opening words

The Lord God is our shepherd.
We are the people of God's pasture,
the sheep of God's hand.
God will seek the lost,
feed the hungry,
and strengthen the weak.
But the proud and power-hungry
will be fed with justice.

Prayer

God of majesty,
you love us with an everlasting love
and show us the way to justice and peace.
In Jesus Christ you have reconciled the
whole world to you
and claimed us as your own,
that we may live as his body on earth and,
with all the saints, enter into your glory
on the last day. **Amen.**

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures for ever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Prayer

With sincere and repentant hearts,
let us name our sins against Christ and one another.

Sovereign God, we confess
that we are not ready for your holy realm.
You guide us toward right paths,
but we refuse to follow where you lead.
You love and feed and care for us,
but we fail to love and serve others.
Forgive us, merciful God,
so that we may return to your fold
and rejoice in your presence;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
the Lamb upon the throne. Amen.

However long we wander,
however far we stray,
God's steadfast love endures forever.
Sisters and brothers, be assured:
in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Hymn Rejoice! The Lord is King

Reading 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. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

³⁴Then 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; ³⁵for 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, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷Then 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? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And 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.’

⁴¹Then 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; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I 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.’ ⁴⁴Then 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?’ ⁴⁵Then 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.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Reflection

Holy God, open your Word.
Give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation,
that our eyes may be enlightened
and we may know the hope to which we have been called;
through Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen.**

Today marks the end of the Christian year: as one year ends and another begins with Advent, we take this day to reflect on what it means to think of Jesus Christ as a King, and what his kingdom, or reign, might look like. We proclaim the risen and ascended Christ the King over all creation, even as we look to his coming again, to bring that creation to perfection and to call us to account for our faithfulness to the promise of the gospel.

In ancient times, justice and the passing of judgment, was the prerogative of rulers – just as today all our courts and judges administer justice in the name of the crown. Matthew describes Jesus coming with the angels of God, as one who will judge the nations and peoples of the world, like a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats as the flocks are brought in from open pasture into the sheepfold or the goat-pen as night falls.

It's a scene and an image with which the disciples of Jesus would have been familiar – and its meaning obvious. While sheep and goats may graze together during the day, the time comes to make a distinction between them – good and evil, right and wrong, light and darkness may all exist in the world and in people's hearts, but the time will come for everything to be made new, and for all to be made healed of their sin. Jesus has received power and glory; he reigns King, he is the Shepherd of the people, and the Judge of the nations. Before him every knee bows and every tongue confesses that he is Lord.

Yet the question remains – by what standards, by which actions, are the nations, and the people, to be judged, and the goats and sheep distinguished one from another? We believe that God is love, and that the love of God has been revealed in Jesus Christ, who came to heal our wounds and save us, by reconciling us with one another and with God. Jesus gave his life on the cross, and the Roman soldiers mocked him, as King of the Jews, in the sign they nailed above his head.

The Kingship of Christ is one that reveals the love of God for world, ready to sacrifice everything to save us for the eternal life of the kingdom of God. We believe that in coming to us in Jesus Christ, by sharing our human life and our human fate, God has set us free from sin and death, and we should not be afraid. At the same time, the experience of God in Christ is an encounter that demand a response from us: a response of faith and thanksgiving in return for the grace and power of God that offers fullness of life. We have received the promise of the kingdom, and its life, light, joy and peace; so why then, and how, will we be judged?

The love revealed in Jesus, the love which seeks our salvation through his sacrifice, the love that is God's true nature, is made known to us still, through God's Holy Spirit, which empowers us to continue as Jesus began, driving us to action that proves our faith.

To feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit those who are in prison. As God has loved us, so we are to love one another, fulfilling our responsibility to those who share this world with us, and especially those whose needs, be they physical, emotional or spiritual, are the greatest. As we have received, so we must give, sharing what God has given – time, love, care, attention, money, food - with those who have little or none of these things.

If we live and behave like this, with such an attitude of heart and mind that God's love and compassion are made known, then we may hope to be judged righteous, and inherit the kingdom. What we cannot be is people who show no care or concern for others, who walk by on the other side when they see others suffering, or who want to have everything for ourselves while there are people who go hungry and cold, without shelter and without hope; people whose lack of faith is betrayed by our lack of love.

Whenever we act in love to serve the needs of the least, we have ministered to Christ himself, and that when we have failed to serve the needs of others we have denied Christ himself. 'If you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me'.

As his earthly ministry – and life – draw to a close, Jesus affirms what he proclaimed at its beginning, in the sermon on the mount and in the beatitudes, that the kingdom of God is unlike any earthly kingdom, and he, who will reign in it, is not like any earthly king.

His is a kingdom in which the poor are raised up and the mighty are brought low, where the hungry are filled with good things, and the rich are sent empty away, empty. He is the Son of God who reigns in glory yet who stoops low to embrace the poor and the outcast, the weak and the brokenhearted, those who live on the margins of our world, and often overlooked by it.

To live under Christ's reign, to follow our King, means to live in this world by the values of the world that is yet to come; it means faithful obedience to the one who calls us, and it means that we as Christians, are called to serve not ourselves alone, but the world and its peoples, in his name. We are called to be courageous in our compassion, generous in our sharing, spirit-filled in our actions, and ready to confront all that oppresses human worth and human dignity, denying the fullness of life to those who bear the very image of God.

Then, we might hope and pray that we will, in Christ and by faith and the grace of God, be welcomed into that everlasting kingdom, in which the first are last and the last first, and where the one who wishes to be greatest, must learn to become the servant of all.

Prayers of Intercession

Our Shepherd satisfies our needs;
in faith, let us pray to the Lord, saying,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.
O Lord, our God, we pray for the church.

As you have made Christ the head of all,
help us to live faithfully as his body,

continuing his mission in the world.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, our God, we pray for the earth. . . .
Let all the earth make a joyful noise to you,
a song of praise to the rock of our salvation,
for you are coming to reveal a new creation.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, our God, we pray for all nations. . . .
Drive out those wolves in sheep's clothing
who abuse the weak and scatter the flock.
Come and save us; bring justice and peace.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, our God, we pray for this community. . . .
Help us to see Christ among our neighbours,
serving those who are hungry and thirsty,
naked and lonely, sick or in prison.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, our God, we pray for loved ones. . . .
Remember the people of your pasture:
rescue the lost, bind up the broken,
heal the sick, and feed those who hunger.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Shepherd, lead and guide us—
in green pastures and by still waters,
in right paths and through dark valleys,
until we feast with you in glory
and dwell in your house forever;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn **Crown him with many crowns**

Benediction