

## Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit

### Worship at Home

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020

### Christ the King

#### Preparation

As we continue to worship separately, remember those worshipping in different places and ways.

#### Call to worship

God within and beyond us all,  
We come now to worship you,  
Silence our hearts and minds that we may listen  
for the movement of your Spirit within us, and  
treasure your presence in the depths of our  
being.

#### Listen, read, pray or sing along – StF 264

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aICQ7fb0hEA>

Make way, make way, for Christ the King  
in splendour arrives;  
fling wide the gates and welcome him  
into your lives.

Make way (Make way), make way (make way),  
for the King of kings (for the King of kings);  
make way (make way), make way (make way),  
and let his Kingdom in.

He comes the broken hearts to heal,  
the prisoners to free;  
the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,  
the blind shall see.

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,  
who weep and sigh,  
with laughter, joy and royal crown  
he'll beautify.

We call you now to worship him  
as Lord of all,  
to have no gods before him,  
their thrones must fall!

*Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)*

#### Prayer of adoration

Gracious God,  
we come before you this morning in adoration  
and praise and with thanksgiving for your  
faithfulness, generosity and love.

Maker of the desert, the rainforest, the ocean  
and the mountain, we praise you and give you  
thanks for the gift of creation.

We thank you that your love searches the hearts  
of all people, calling those who stray and seeking  
the lost. You are our strength, our protection, our  
hope, source of all goodness and love. We praise  
and adore you and bless you as our King.

#### Confession

Forgive us O God, that we live in a world where  
so often the hungry go unfed, the thirsty remain  
parched and strangers are not befriended.  
Forgive us that we live in a world where the sick  
go untended and prisoners are too easily  
forgotten. We know you are a God of justice and  
mercy and on that we depend. Forgive us and  
help us to follow Christ more fully every day.

#### Assurance of forgiveness

God is love  
And forgives our sins through Jesus

**Amen**

#### Old Testament Reading:

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 25:31-46

#### Reflection and Questions

Liturgically speaking, *Christ the King* marks the  
last Sunday of the Church year. The lectionary for  
next week's Advent Sunday begins a new Church  
year.

The theme for this Sunday relates to the universal rule of God, expressed in Christ, the shepherd-King.

The passage from Ezekiel likens God to a shepherd. The shepherd here, however, is caring for domestic animals in a way we might find rather unusual. A large part of his time is not being spent with the fit and healthy sheep who are sure to make him a living, but instead it is being spent on seeking those that have strayed, got lost, or been injured.

The phrase 'survival of the fittest' is one we are probably all familiar with. It's often associated with Charles Darwin but in fact it was actually coined by Herbert Spencer who, when commenting on Darwin's '*On the origin of Species*' suggested that it was a better phrase than Darwin's '*natural selection*'. Over time the phrase has been applied well beyond its origins and used to justify all kinds of callous behaviour.

The passage from Ezekiel provides us with a strong indication that the universal rule of God is one in which those who are not 'the fittest', or who don't perhaps 'fit', not only survive, they thrive.

Another phrase we often hear used these days is 'fat cats'. It seems to me that this particular phrase resonates somewhat with these verses from Ezekiel which refer to 'fat sheep'.

'I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice'  
Ezekiel 34 v16.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday also speaks of the universal reign of God described here as the gathering of the nations before the throne of the Christ in all his glory. It describes a process of separation, of division, in the way that a shepherd might well divide his flock into sheep and goats.

The sheep will be placed at his right hand and Christ the King will say to them: '*Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the*

*world: 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, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me*'.

The goats, however, having neglected to do all of the above will not inherit eternal life, instead they will be on the receiving end of God's justice.

God is a judge who, in the final reckoning, is absolutely committed to ensuring a truly just outcome for all.

What strikes me about this passage from Matthew is that it refers to whole nations as being sheep or goats. For us today living within the culture of individualism, it's all too easy to miss that. It does seem that what this passage is suggesting is that Christ the King is delivering justice not only to individuals, but also to whole nations of people.

I wonder therefore if this might mean that we are being invited as followers of Christ the King, to respond with compassion to those in need not only individually and as the Church - but also to engage fully in ensuring that as a nation we are doing so too. That means we can't avoid being informed about politics and being prepared to get involved, particularly when there is a need for us to challenge systemic injustice within our own nation.

The provision of foodbanks, night shelters, prison and hospital chaplaincies are great examples of churches and other charitable organisations responding to human need with love and compassion. However, on their own they are not enough. God calls us to go further than this and to challenge the unjust system which upholds the very need for them.

The work of the **Joint Public Issues Team** of which the Methodist Church plays a part produced a report in the summer of 2020 which is called '*Building back with justice: Dismantling inequalities after Covid-19*'.

From this, JPIT has identified 6 hopes for society:

- 1 A just economy that enables the flourishing of all life;
- 2 A planet where our environment is renewed;
- 3 A society where the poor and marginalised are at the centre;
- 4 A world which actively works for peace;
- 5 A politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness;
- 6 A society that welcomes the stranger.

The universal reign of God, expressed in Christ, the Shepherd-King is glimpsed wherever these things are being put into practice. As the Church we are called to be a sign of hope for the world, we are called to share the good news of Christ who came so that all may receive eternal life.

Questions to think about this week:

- Is the church of which I am part a place where those in the society of today who somehow just *'don't fit'* are not merely tolerated but are genuinely celebrated and enabled to thrive?
- Does the church of which I am part have a vision which encompasses the 6 hopes identified by JPIT?
- Does the church of which I am part speak publically about God's justice?

**Listen, read, pray or sing along StF 672**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOamiaWOb6E>

Where can we find you Lord Jesus, our Master?  
We want to serve you, to answer your call.  
Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?  
What should we do in our service to all?

'Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing; go where the farmlands are empty and bare. I broke the bread for the people around me; out of my plenty think what you can share.

'Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;  
Go where my people seep out in the rain.  
I had no comforts but what others gave me; offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.

'Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;  
Go where sheep are rejected and lost.  
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;  
Go and do likewise and don't count the cost

Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?  
We are your servants who answer your call.  
You go before us, and there we will follow,  
Taking our cross in the service of all.

Allan Charles Dickinson (b.1954)

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Compassionate God,  
We pray for a world where the weak are protected and no one goes hungry or thirsty.  
We pray for those places where there is war, conflict or only fragile peace - remembering especially the people of Yemen, Ethiopia and Cameroon. Give courage and strength to those working for peace in these regions.

*Pause*

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the well-being of all people across the world suffering as a result of the Covid 19 virus. We pray for the sick, the lonely and the bereaved, for those who are anxious about their jobs and fearful of what the future may bring.

*Pause*

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for a world where different races, nations and cultures live in tolerance and mutual respect. We pray for the healing of division and an end to the evil of racism in the USA. We pray for peace and harmony between different ethnic groups in many parts of the world today.

*Pause*

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us**

We pray for your Church, carrying a Gospel of forgiveness and freedom in a broken world. Give us the courage and the willingness to be your witnesses in ways that are generous, kind and respectful. Fill us with your love so that we might act with compassions towards others.

*Pause*

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who may be finding life particularly difficult at the moment, some perhaps within our own families, within our church or within our wider circle of friends. Comfort, strengthen and touch with your generous love all those who are on our hearts today. Fill them with hope and healing, in spirit, mind and body.

*Pause*

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

Keep us, O God, in the joy, simplicity and compassionate love of the Gospel. Bless us this day and strengthen us to serve you this coming week faithfully and courageously. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour,  
**Amen.**

**The Lord's Prayer**

**Offering and Prayer of Dedication**

*If you give your weekly offering through an envelope scheme or in cash, please set it aside, and pray with those who give using Standing orders.*

Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them our lives, to be used in mission and service through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Listen, read, pray or sing along StF 415**

The church of Christ in every age,  
beset by change but Spirit-led,  
must claim and test its heritage  
and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,  
the victims of injustice cry  
for shelter and for bread to eat,  
and never live until they die.

Then let the servant church arise,  
a caring church that longs to be  
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,  
and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,  
can cure the fever in our blood,  
and teach us how to share our bread  
and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve  
in full obedience to our Lord:  
to care for all, without reserve,  
and spread his liberating word.

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

**Blessing**

May the blessing of God,  
the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer  
be with you now and always Amen.

Resources:

Texts for Preaching, a lectionary Commentary, Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome, John Knox Press 1995  
The intercessions handbook, creative ideas for public and private prayer, John Pritchard SPCK 1997

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