

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Service at Home: Sunday 7th May**

prepared by Ken Richardson

Preparation

One of the challenges of producing this weekly service sheet is that it has to be finalised a few days in advance. So, as I write these words, the coronation of King Charles III is still a week away whilst the sheet is intended for use on the day afterwards. It is therefore not possible for me to respond to the events of Coronation Day itself but I thought it appropriate to choose as my theme for today, *Christ the King*, in recognition of the commitment and service that, as Christians, we offer to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings.

Take a moment to collect your thoughts and prepare to worship God.

Call to Worship

Let us remember that we are in the presence of the King of Kings, a king who loves us and comes to us just as we are, a king who is a servant of all, a king who gave up his life on a cross so that we might be saved, and who rose again and ascended to heaven to reside in glory with God, the Father. Amen.

Listen, read, pray or sing StF 228 (a hymn that draws on the words of Psalm 72 which takes as its theme 'The Perfect King'):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkrepBvrLl4>

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free,
to take away transgression,
and rule in equity.

He comes, with succour speedy,
to those who suffer wrong;
to help the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and dying,
are precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth;
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,
spring in his path to birth;
before him, on the mountains,
shall peace the herald go;
and righteousness, in fountains,
from hill to valley flow.

Kings shall fall down before him,
and gold and incense bring;
all nations shall adore him,
his praise all people sing;
to him shall prayer unceasing
and daily vows ascend,
his kingdom still increasing,
a kingdom without end.

O'er every foe victorious,
he on his throne shall rest;
from age to age more glorious,
all-blessing and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand for ever,
his changeless name of Love.

James Montgomery (1771-1754)

Opening Prayers

Jesus Christ, son of the living God,
We lift your name up high,
for you are the Kings of Kings.
We worship you and give thanks
for your life of service,
we praise you for your sacrifice on the cross,
we give you honour
for your glorious resurrection and ascension.
All worship, praise and honour be to you. Amen.

A Prayer of Confession ...

Almighty God, you sent your son to be our saviour, yet he humbled himself before others, seeking glory not for himself but for you, so that his whole life and ministry on earth gave supreme expression to the values of your kingdom.

We try to follow his example but always fall short and so we come to you now seeking your forgiveness:

- Forgive us for when we have tried to exert power over others;
- Forgive us for when we have failed to show compassion to those in need;
- Forgive us for when we have sought glory for ourselves rather than you.

Hear God's words of grace:

'Your sins are forgiven'

Help us to listen to your voice and seek your truth, so that we may do justice, love mercy and walk humbly towards your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Read: Luke 1 v 68-79

Reflection

In the 'new' Coventry Cathedral, in place of the traditional East Window behind the altar is a huge tapestry designed by the artist Graham Sutherland. The first thing the viewer appreciates is its sheer scale; 23 metres in height, woven in one piece and weighing over one tonne. It depicts *Christ in Glory*, or *Christ the King*, seated and enthroned in heaven. Around him the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are represented by their traditional symbols, an angel, lion, ox and eagle respectively. On the right-hand side Satan is being thrown into hell, and between Christ's feet is the figure of a human being. The hands and feet of Christ carry the marks of the nails of the crucifixion. There is triumph here, representing victory over death, but not triumphalism. For Christ wears not so much the royal clothes of a king but the robes of a priest, and as we look more closely we become aware of his humanity - his face conveys the message that here is someone who has intimately shared in our human life here on earth.

I have chosen as my reading for today Luke 1 v 68-79, a passage that is associated with the Sunday in the church calendar that we celebrate as the *Feast of Christ the King*, the Sunday before Advent which therefore always falls in November. The passage is known as the '*Benedictus*', named after its first word in Latin, and contains words of blessing spoken by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, on the occasion of his son's birth.

Luke interweaves the birth and infancy narratives of John and Jesus across the first two chapters of his gospel, and so the '*Benedictus*' has its counterpart in the '*Magnificat*', the words of blessing spoken by Mary as part of Jesus' birth narrative. The reading is divided into two parts; verses 68-75 are a 'song' of praise to God for his saving grace in fulfilling the promises he made to the Old Testament prophets by sending his son Jesus to be the world's saviour, and verses 76-79 speak of John the Baptist's role in preparing the way for Jesus, and also provides us with a reminder of our calling to point the way towards Jesus for others today.

Kingship and God's Kingdom

When we think of a king, our first thoughts are typically of someone who has immense wealth and power. Someone such as King Solomon, who ruled Israel during the 10th century BC and, we are told, '*was greater in riches than all of the other kings on earth*' (2Ch 9 v22) ... or David, his predecessor and father, a great warrior king who unified a defeated and divided group of tribes, created an empire that stretched from Egypt to beyond Damascus, and made Jerusalem its capital. It was a king such as this that the Jews expected God's Messiah to be, a king who would restore the glory that the nation had known in previous times, a king who would overthrow the Romans and win back their independence. But this is not the kind of king that Jesus would be; his ideas about Messiah-ship were very different. For Jesus wasn't interested in ruling over an earthly kingdom but rather sought to create a spiritual kingdom, the Kingdom of God. This is the type of king that Zechariah hints at in the '*Benedictus*'. Yes, the link to David, Israel's greatest King, is there (v 69) and the passage is peppered with phrases that express redemption (v68), salvation (v 69 & v71) and rescue (v 74) from enemies. But rather than liberation from an occupying power, the Romans, God has another kind of liberation in mind, rescue and salvation from sin, and a different kind of kingdom, one based on the values of justice, mercy, compassion and humility.

Eastertide is a good time to reflect upon the theme of *Christ the King*, because so much of the practical expression of Jesus' idea of kingship is present in the Easter story. A few weeks ago on

Palm Sunday, we celebrated his entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, and of his choosing to ride, not on a horse, but on a donkey; a sign that he came in peace rather than in anticipation of fighting a war of independence against the Romans. Then there is no greater example of Jesus' humility than when he washed his disciple's feet at the Last Supper. It was a task that only the lowliest servant would normally carry out, but Jesus demonstrated that he was happy to do so instead; a symbolic act that showed he was prepared to humble himself in the service of others. His dignity was stripped away completely when, after his trial, he was beaten, forced to wear a crown of thorns, and then mocked as the 'King of the Jews'. To the world's eyes he had become the very antithesis of a king.

Isaiah (see, for example, Isaiah 42 v 1-7) writes of the Messiah as someone destined to suffer for his people, a servant who brings justice to all the nations - a light for the Gentiles as well as the Israelites, someone to open the eyes of the spiritually blind and free those who are imprisoned or kept in darkness. In Jesus, the two Jewish ideas of the Messianic King and the Suffering Servant are brought together; he is the archetypal Servant King.

Response

The first part of the '*Benedictus*' passage concludes with a reminder that, in response to God's offer of salvation through Jesus, we are called 'to serve him ... in holiness and righteousness' (v 74) and to do so 'all our days.' In the second part of the passage, Zechariah turns to his own son, and prophesies for him a life of service in response to God's 'tender mercy' (v 78) in sending his son Jesus 'to shine on those living in darkness' (v 79a) and 'to guide our feet into the path of peace' (v 79b). John the Baptist will 'go before the Lord to prepare the way for him' (v 76) and preach a message 'of salvation through the forgiveness of sins' (v 77). Like John, we are also called to respond to God's 'tender mercy' by unconditionally offering ourselves to God and his service, to live a Kingdom life according to the rule of God and his ways and values.

Alongside the new Coventry Cathedral lie the ruins of the old one, destroyed by enemy action

on the night of November 14th 1940. After the war, the decision was taken to leave these ruins in situ as a symbol of sacrifice, of both the people of Coventry during the war, and of Christ on the cross, with the new cathedral representing the triumph of the resurrection. My guidebook describes moving from the old to the new as a 'walk from Good Friday to Easter, from death to new life.' It is a place of hope and resurrection, and also reconciliation between former enemies which, in the final words of the '*Benedictus*', helps 'guide our feet into the path of peace' (v 79b).

Jesus' supreme sacrifice on the cross was for our sake. He took the sin of the world upon himself so that we may all have everlasting life. His death makes it possible for there to be real peace and joy in people's hearts and throughout the whole world. Christ comes to us as the Servant King. Let us follow his example and serve God through the way that we serve others in his name, and thus allow the king who reigns from the cross, and has reigned in the lives of countless Christians down the centuries, to reign in our lives too. Amen.

Listen, read, pray or sing StF 272:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrQilEO4D5s>

From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

Graham Kendrick (b.1950)

Prayer of Intercession

We pray for those in positions of power:
for the leaders of the nations - Monarchs,
Presidents, Prime Ministers,
for all who have authority over others,
that they may wield their power and authority
with integrity and compassion.

*Father, thine be the glory,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

We pray for those who lack power and agency
over their own lives,
those who have suffered from the abuse of
power by others,
those whose lives are blighted by poverty and
disadvantage.

*Father, thine be the glory,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

We pray that you will give us the strength to
stand by the powerless and defend the weak,
to promote truth and campaign for justice,
to use the power and influence that we have
for the good of all.

*Father, thine be the glory,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

We pray for all those known personally to us,
who are in particular need of our prayers today,
those who are sick, or have been bereaved,
those who have a difficult or life-changing
decision to make.

*Father, thine be the glory,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

Merciful Father, hear these our prayers,
which we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our
Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Listen, read, pray or sing StF 335:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDFAv0eh-s8>

Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore;
mortals, give thanks, and sing,
and triumph evermore:

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice; rejoice!
Again I say: rejoice!*

Jesus the Saviour reigns,
the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains,
he took his seat above:

His kingdom cannot fail,
he rules both earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell
are to our Jesus given:

He sits at God's right hand
till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command,
and fall beneath his feet:

Rejoice in glorious hope,
Jesus the Judge shall come
and take his servants up
to their eternal home:

*We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
God's trumpet-call shall sound: rejoice!*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing

Christ our King, reign in our lives.
May we be assured of your presence
and saving grace,
and be blessed with the knowledge of your glory.
May your Spirit inspire and guide us,
May our hearts be filled with your peace,
May we have the strength to serve you and to
live Kingdom lives, now and always. Amen.

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