

**A service for 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2024 (Christ the King) (StF)**

**Call to Worship: Isaiah chapter 32 verses 1 to 3 (New Century Bible)**

A king will rule in a way that brings justice, and leaders will make fair decisions. Then each ruler will be like a shelter from the wind, like a safe place in a storm, like streams of water in a dry land, like a cool shadow from a large rock in a hot land. People will look to the king for help, and they will truly listen to what he says. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by a Rector of Lower Brixham, Revd. Henry Francis Lyte. When he was ordained, most church music was either metrical psalms, or hymns closely linked to them and Rev. Lyte felt that parishioners deserved better, so he produced a book, "Spirit of the Psalms" in 1834, in which several excellent adaptations of Psalms were found, the most famous of which is a paraphrase of Psalm 103, 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven'. Henry Lyte wanted to write something that he could leave behind to 'live to the glory of God'; a hymn that would not be ephemeral. He achieved his aim by writing both this hymn and 'Abide with me'. We shall sing hymn number 83, 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven'.*

**1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
To his feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like thee his praise should sing?  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise the everlasting King!**

**2. Praise him for his grace and favour  
To our fathers in distress;  
Praise him still, the same for ever,  
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Glorious in his faithfulness.**

**3. Father-like, he tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame he knows;  
In His hands he gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Widely as his mercy flows.**

**4. Angels in the height, adore him,  
Ye behold him face to face;  
Sun and moon, bow down before him,  
Dwellers all in time and space.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise with us the God of grace!**

© Henry Francis Lyte {1793 – 1847}

***Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.***

Sovereign Lord, Creator of the universe, you breathe life into every living being and you provide the needs of your creation with your steadfast love. Your power and wisdom are as unfathomable as your boundless grace, yet we know you care for sinful human beings so much you have tried to draw us close to you from the beginning of time.

Although we rebelled against you, instead of rejecting, or punishing us, you took our mortal form and came to us as Christ the King.

Jesus lived among us, without rank or privilege, to reveal your true nature in his teaching and healing, but he paid the price for all sins on a cross at Calvary. By his resurrection, Jesus broke the power of death and he offers us new life through his grace alone. Therefore, Lord, we come to you with joyful hearts, asking you to take away all anxieties that may distract us from worship, in the name of Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

***Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession to the Lord.***

Heavenly Father, we offer thanks for the many blessings we receive from you, day by day: for the beautiful, self-sustaining, yet fragile world on which we live; for the many good things we enjoy; for people who have blessed us by their example and loving-care, but most of all that you love us even at our worst, when we are loveless and unlovable.

Merciful Lord, pardon us when we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves, for our words and actions that hurt others and grieve you. Forgive us for times when we see neighbours in need or distress and don't help them. Help us change our ways and help us to love and serve you wholeheartedly.

Gracious, faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us, but call us to follow you once more. Therefore, Lord, as you offer us a fresh start, fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in the blessed name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend. Amen.

***As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:***

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

*The next hymn is based upon Philippians chapter 2 verse 10 and it was written by an Anglican priest's daughter, Caroline Noel, for Ascension Day in 1870. We sing hymn number 317, 'At the name of Jesus,'*

**1. At the name of Jesus**

**Every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue confess him  
King of glory now.**

**'Tis the Father's pleasure  
We should call him Lord,  
Who from the beginning  
Was the mighty Word.**

**2. Humbled for a season,**

**To receive a name  
From the lips of sinners  
Unto whom he came,  
Faithfully he bore it  
Spotless to the last,  
Brought it back victorious,  
When from death he passed:**

**3. Bore it up triumphant**

**With its human light,  
Through all ranks of creatures  
To the central height,  
To the throne of Godhead,  
To the Father's breast;  
Filled it with the glory  
Of that perfect rest.**

**4. In your hearts enthrone him;  
There let him subdue  
All that is not holy,  
All that is not true;  
Crown him as your Captain  
In temptation's hour:  
Let his will enfold you  
In its light and power.**

**5. For this same Lord Jesus  
Shall return again,  
With his Father's glory,  
With his angel train;  
All the wreaths of empire  
Meet upon his brow,  
And our hearts confess him  
King of Glory now.**

© *Caroline Maria Noel {1817 – 1877}*

***In our intercessions, we remember neighbours nearby and far away.***

Lord of glory, we recognize your faithfulness in meeting our daily needs and for loving us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, as the Servant King, who is the model for our discipleship. We pray for our neighbours, nearby or far away, asking you to grant us the faith and compassion to act as your earthly hands, as we seek to support people who are in need or distress, but where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to intervene, for all is possible to you.

Lord of all, we pray for the leaders of the world's nations. Grant them wisdom and compassion to care for the well-being of the people they govern. Teach them to seek justice and to deal mercifully, for justice and mercy are essential for real peace to be established. Indeed, we pray for peace in this troubled world, especially for a just and swift end to fighting in the Holy Land and between Ukraine and Russia, besides Sudan and Somalia where their populations are threatened with famines as a result of the fighting. Lord, bless everyone who is working for peace: for negotiators, aid-workers and medics, particularly those who are putting themselves at risk by serving on the front line. Remember in your mercy, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression. May they receive the support they need to rebuild their lives and find healing.

We pray for the churches in our area and, indeed, the World Church. Help us speak of the grace of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission, so we build up our community in his name. Let us bear the gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world.

We remember people who are sick in body, mind or spirit; for people living with a dementia and their carers; for all who are lonely, afraid, or in any kind of need or trouble. We pray in particular for everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear and

finds bereavement unbearable. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned.

..... Lord, while we ask you to help us provide them with both practical support and friendship, enfold them in the warmth of your love, so they may be comforted, find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

Lord of life, recent terrible floods in Europe and the USA and wildfires on several continents, are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for all disaster- stricken people and pray for them to receive swift, practical aid. Most of all, we pray that all humankind comes to recognize the need for change before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

Abba, heavenly Father bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us share the abundance of your love, day by day, with everybody we meet, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn written by Graham Kendrick for "Spring Harvest" in 1983. Hymn number 272, 'The Servant King'.*

**1. 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. *Chorus:***

*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.*

**2. 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. *Chorus:***

**3. Come see His hands and His feet,  
The scars that speak of sacrifice ;  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered. *Chorus:***

**4. 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. *Chorus:***

© Graham Kendrick

**The Gospel reading is John chapter 18 verses 33 to 37**

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

Jesus said,

"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Amen.

### **Sermon – What is kingship?**

The coronation of King Charles a year and a half ago was not as lavish as that of the late Queen in 1953. Nevertheless, it included three symbols of kingship: the holding of the sceptre in his right hand to show he holds temporal power over his subjects; the orb in his left hand to show that he is God’s representative over the kingdom and the anointing with oil as a sign that he is consecrated by God’s power. Apologies to any republicans, but that is what the ceremony represents. Although the power of the monarchy has diminished over generations as our parliamentary democracy has developed, King Charles has to sign Bills from Parliament before they become laws.

At the time of Jesus, the Romans controlled Judea and they put Herod the Great as a puppet king. Knowing that many Jews despised him, Herod was a shrewd man, so he began to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem to curry favour with them, for the second temple was a mere shadow of the one built in the reign of King Solomon. Herod was a dangerous man, killing one of his wives and two sons, amongst many others. Like kings of his time, Herod had power of life and death over his subjects and he could promote or get rid of anyone according to how he felt. Kings were rich, enjoyed luxury and expected to be honoured wherever they went. They made their own laws and always sat in the position of honour. Even the Roman Governors treated the King of Judea with respect. By the time of our gospel reading Herod the Great was dead and three of his sons had ruled the land which had been divided among them. One son, **Archelaus** had been exiled and replaced by **Pontius Pilate** which is why Jesus appeared before him in our reading.

Pilate held the Jews and the Jewish faith in contempt, which did not help his governorship. He was more a military man than a politician and his role was marred by a number of conflicts, the first occurring almost as soon as he was appointed, according to the historian, Josephus. Pilate allowed the Roman troops to take their standards into Jerusalem and, as they contained images of the Emperor, Jews considered them to be idolatrous and made such a fuss that Pilate had to have them removed. He caused offence again when he installed some golden shields in his Jerusalem residence which again were deemed idolatrous, but he refused to remove them until the Jews threatened to appeal to **Emperor Tiberius**.

The Sanhedrin took Jesus to Pilate just before Pessach, the Passover Festival, not because they liked or respected the Governor, but because they were afraid of a backlash from ordinary Jews, were they to try to put him to death – whereas the anger of the masses would be redirected towards the occupying Romans if they executed Jesus. Moreover, the Jewish authorities wanted to make an example of Christ, for whilst they had the power to put people to death by stoning, the Romans used crucifixion, which was a slow, tortuous method of execution – a warning to others.

The Sanhedrin knew that a charge of blasphemy itself would be difficult to prove to a sympathetic Roman Governor, far more so when Pilate was openly hostile to Judaism. Therefore, they sought to impeach Jesus on three counts that they thought would alarm, or infuriate Pilate: they accused Jesus of trying to subvert the Jews, of opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar and of claiming to be ‘**Christ, a king**’. Whilst charges of blasphemy would have been scoffed at, any threat against Rome, especially a challenge against Caesar, must be taken seriously, so Pilate summoned Jesus before him. Clearly,

Jesus' humble appearance amazed the Governor, for the translation of his question, **'Are you the king of the Jews?'** fails to carry the sense of wonder in the original Greek. A better translation would be, **'Are you really the king of the Jews, poor creature that you are?'** Jesus responded by asking whether Pilate himself was accusing him, or was he acting on the reports of other people, to which the Governor retorted contemptuously, **'Am I a Jew? It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me.'** He asked Jesus, **'What is it you have done?'** Here was a man unmoved by faith or cultural matters, concerned simply with politics and whether or not Jesus posed a threat to Rome.

Jesus' answer reassured Pilate that he was neither a zealot, nor a guerrilla leader, set on temporal power, for his kingdom was not a worldly one. Had it been so, his servants – probably an army of angels – would have fought to resist his arrest. However, Pilate seized on the word, **'kingdom'**, and said, **'You are a king, then!'** Jesus affirmed this, but said that his kingdom is the kingdom of truth and added, **"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."** The Governor was unmoved by Jesus' words and asked a question that has echoed down the centuries, **"What is truth?"** Pilate was a man more concerned by political advantage than in mercy and justice, for although he believed Jesus was wholly innocent, he played a cynical game, trying to have Jesus released by public demand and when told that if he released Christ he would be showing disloyalty to Caesar, Pilate simply condemned our Lord, even though he had committed no crime – he saw him as an ordinary Jew, whose life was simply of no account.

Pontius Pilate demanded to know what truth is, as though it is a commodity that can be bought and sold, the property of the powerful and wealthy. We live in times when spin-doctors regularly distort the truth for their own political ends, times when politicians who have behaved badly, sneer that **'it is within the rules'**, as though that exonerates their dishonourable conduct. We live in an era when many people believe it acceptable to pilfer from work, or to be unfaithful to husband, wife, or partner.

The gospels proclaim Jesus' kingship as radical, life-changing and life-affirming, for he brought healing of body, mind and spirit to the sick, he offered forgiveness and reconciliation to the most despised of sinners and reached beyond the boundaries of Judaism to offer grace to Gentiles – even to the Jews' bitterest enemies, Romans and Samaritans. Instead of seeking power, Christ gave it up, to die helplessly on a cross for sinners like us – indeed, for everybody. **Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Truth is that God loves us all with such a passion he gave the most precious One of all to redeem us from sin, to offer us new life and a new covenant based on love and faith, not on observing an intricate set of rules. Truth is that Christ Jesus calls us to love one another, to share the love he freely gives us, for only by loving our neighbours can they see value and truth in the Good News our Saviour brought for all.** Let us carry this truth in our hearts as we enter Advent, as we make a place in our hearts fit for Christ Jesus to make his home. Amen.

*How many of you remember the radio series, "Round the Horne"? Well, it may interest you to know that our closing hymn was written in 1909 by Revd. Charles Silvester Horne, the father of Kenneth Horne! We conclude our worship as we sing hymn number 185, 'Sing we the King who is coming to reign;'*

**1. Sing we the King who is coming to reign;**

**Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!**

**Life and salvation his empire shall bring,**

**Joy to the nations when Jesus is King: *Chorus***

*Come, let us sing: Praise to our King,  
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:  
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:  
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

**2. All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;  
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;  
Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;  
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King: *Chorus***

**3. Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;  
Doubt shall not darken his witness within;  
Hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;  
Love is victorious when Jesus is King: *Chorus***

**4. Kingdom of Christ, for thy coming we pray;  
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day  
When this new song thy creation shall sing:  
Satan is vanquished, and Jesus is King: *Chorus*    © Charles Silvester Horne (1865 – 1914)**  
***Benediction***

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**