

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 23rd November 2025

Christ the King

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Note

A fairly recent practice in the life of the Church is to mark the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year as the festival of Christ the King. Jesus has been acclaimed as King since the earliest days of the faith; Gabriel's greeting to Mary noted that Jesus would have the throne of his father David, would rule over Jacob forever and would have a kingdom without end, the Book of Revelation declares that the Lamb that was slain is "king of kings and Lord of lords." Images from the 4th Century show Jesus as Ruler of All – often seated on a rainbow. In 1925 Pope Pius XI published an encyclical *Quas primas* noting that Jesus' kingship was given to him by the Father and was not a dominion ceased by violence or usurped from another. Pope Pius also instituted the feast of Christ the King originally towards the end of October and moved to the Sunday before Advent in the 1960s. Pius' words should be reflected on with the reality that the papacy was still smarting from the seizure of the papal states (which included most of Italy) during the process which united Italy into one nation. They were finally incorporated into Italy in 1870 – just 45 years before Pius' words. This seizure led the Church to refuse to deal with the Italian government until it made an agreement with Mussolini in 1929. Pius contrasted the God's kingdom with the passing kingdoms of the world. In our own lifetimes we've seen kingdoms and nations rise and fall; many of us grew up with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with the nation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – to name just some European countries. In more recent years East Timor achieved independence, Sudan and Southern Sudan have come into existence, and most recently Palestine has been recognised as a state by most of the world's countries though the recognition hasn't changed much for the people of Gaza. The feast invites us to ponder God's unchanging realm based on love not violence and to compare that with the realities of the kingdoms and nations of our world. Our readings help us to ponder on the type of king Jesus is.

Call to Worship

What kind of king is this?

A king who acts as a shepherd,
a king who seeks out the lost,
a king who is a gentle guide.

A king who raises up lowly,
A careful shepherd to nurture the flock.

This is our king!

What kind of king is this?

A king who is a refuge in times of trouble,

a king who shelters us from fear,
a king who sustains us in good times and bad.
A king who ceases war, shatters the spear,
breaks the bow and burns the shield.
This is our king!

What kind of a king is this?
A king who forgave his executioners,
a king who promised paradise to a thief,
a king who reached through his agony to offer hope.
This is our king!
Jesus Christ, in whom we live and move and have our being.

Prayer of Approach & Confession

O Most High,
before the ages began
You loved and wanted the best for us,
throughout our lives
You have held us in the palm of Your hands,
watching over us as a shepherd guards the sheep,
nurturing us as a loving parent protects a child,
You are our guide.
You are our light.

We, however, prefer to stumble in the dark.
We seek to create You in our own image – failing to see Your subversive power,
seeking to make You bless our notions of kingship, leadership and authority.

We consecrate power ignoring humility.
We hand our lives to the markets, devoid of humanity.
We seek shelter in worldly policies and politics ignoring Your eternal realm.
We turned away from Your message and nailed Jesus to the Cross,
seeking to pin him down and silence Him;
yet you disrupted our sin and our plans.
You raised Him on high.
Forgive us, good Shepherd,
give us time to change,
that we may challenge and change the powers of our age
and sing your praises forever.

Words of Assurance

Here are words we can trust:
God is rich in mercy, powerful in love, and tender in compassion.

God strengthens us in our weakness
and believes in our potential.
We are forgiven and called to forgive – even ourselves

Prayer of Illumination

Open the power of your Word to us, O Most High,
that we may hear and ponder Your gracious love,
Your fierce tenderness, and Your insistent call
to recognise the powers of our age are overthrown,
that we may acclaim Jesus, our crucified God,
as our subversive yet victorious king. Amen.

Readings

Jeremiah 23: 1-6 | St Luke 23: 33-38 | Colossians 1: 11-20

All Age Activity

You will need a paper crown, a flat cap, thorns, and a jester's hat. You might find it easier to use pictures of these and project on a PowerPoint show. Show each crown in turn and ask which you might choose for a king.

The Crown – what do we think of when we see this kind of crown?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Jewels_of_the_United_Kingdom#/media/File:Saint_Edward's_Crown.jpg

Flat Cap – Might this remind you of a Shepherd?

https://www.123rf.com/photo_141935728_old-shepherd-grazing-his-sheep.html

Thorns – Suffering – shows us what humans can do to each other

https://www.shutterstock.com/search/stalks-thorns?dd_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

Jester – seen as a joke – turning world upside down

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O315295/jesters-cap-unknown/>

When we talk about Jesus as King, we are giving thanks for the kind of leader he was – just, caring, honest, angry at injustice. He wasn't the type of king to rule over others without love or care, like a shepherd he looks after the sheep, the only crown he wore was one of thorns, put on him as an act of torture. Like a jester he turned the world upside down, showing humour to make his points, saying the lowly would get to heaven before the rich and powerful! This is our king!

There is a great temptation to try and explain things when we read of Jesus' death. The horror of it means we search for meaning, interpretation, and reason where, sometimes, it's best just to wrestle with questions and mystery. What follows is a sermon prepared originally for a Palm Sunday service but can be repurposed for Christ the King. It has also been set with images and could be downloaded from here <https://youtu.be/YvmJji48P74> and shown in worship. Alternatively, you might like to read the text that follows (use a puzzled voice) or you may like to take the themes and craft your own sermon.

What kind of King are you Lord? We've got a king again now; and we've known of kings for years. Kings wear crowns, have retainers and flunkies, command armies, live in unimaginable wealth, have stories fed to the press to keep the positive news flowing – though that doesn't always work of course. Kings have families who we are taught to honour and respect. Kings have security – discrete agents, hidden weapons, and security vetting.

Yet none of that seems to be accurate for you. You were born in a stable, not a palace. Your first years were spent in exile not private school. You didn't wear a crown – you seemed to own nothing except your clothes. When you were crowned it was with thorns as a cruel mockery of your reign. You had disciples not flunkies – and some of them weren't very reliable. You had no armies to command, no weapons to rely on. No press in your day of course but I can't imagine you having stories planted on the sly. You had heaven's armies to protect you - but they didn't do a good job now did they? What type of king are you Lord?

What type of priest are you Lord? We know about priests – though we have lots of different names for them – ministers, vicars, pastors, presbyters – but the job's the same. They have to look holy, often wear odd clothing, tell of God's actions, be a bit distant, mix with the right people – marry the type of person who is acceptable in a range of settings. They have to balance being radical with being careful, navigate a plethora of difficult people with tact and, often, seem to follow establishment lines. They have to be creative in liturgy honouring both tradition and change.

Yet none of that seems to be accurate for you. We don't know where you trained but your command of the Bible and its teachings is second to none. You didn't seem to look that holy, you didn't keep that professional distance that ministers are supposed to have. You really mixed with the wrong people – sex workers, collaborators, and dirty gentiles. Your marital status would have led to some questions at a ministry interview – close to John **and** Mary; that would have raised some eyebrows. And what about tact? You really can't call people "whitewashed tombs" and get away with it! You can't call the king a "fox"! (See my earlier comments, Lord, about kings.) I learned very early on in my ministry not to call the church members "morons" - yet you always seemed to be doing that. You called the religious people "snakes and vipers" and implied some people are

pigs. All I can say is it's good you didn't have a difficult Eldership to work with! You'd not have lasted long. And your preaching....not very focused on the Establishment was it? You seemed to sit fast and loose with tradition – stretching laws to breaking points, reinventing liturgy, bringing new meanings and offering mystery not explanation. What type of priest are you, Lord?

What type of leader are you Lord? Leaders have to be slick; they need mission statements and visions for the future. They have focus groups quietly working out what's the best way to get a hearing. Leaders now avoid saying what they really think but want, instead, to please their base. Leaders offer cheap tricks where they blame outsiders for the ills of the world and build themselves up. Leaders need to be popular – don't you know that Lord?

Yet none of this seems to be accurate for you. That nice rich guy who wanted to follow you – you told him to give away all that he had! Come on, wouldn't a nice donation have been good enough? Your message is memorable, I'll give you that, but would it get through a focus group. Turn the other cheek? Love your enemies? If asked for our coat we have to give our shirt as well! See you in the poor and naked and hungry and imprisoned! And then there's all that stuff on money. You just wouldn't get a hearing now Lord. Couldn't you offer a bit of cheap grace now and again – Your Church often does after all! You didn't seem to please your base either – you were nasty to the Pharisees and often told Jewish people that gentiles were more righteous than them. You didn't find a scapegoat for social problems did you Lord? Look where that ended you up. What type of leader are you Lord?

What type of victory did you win Lord? Victory is, well victorious Lord. It involves, often, bloodshed, stunning military or political tactics, the vanquished foe being left to slither away, or being put on trial for their crimes. Victory is about triumph, noise, joy, pomp, marches, celebrations.

Yet none of this seems to be accurate for you. You let yourself be captured. You let Judas, of all people, betray you. You were rude to the High Priests and so wilful to Pilate. You could have summoned the angels and have had a bit of smiting there. That would have been a victory; that would have unseated the might of Rome – imagine the songs your mum would have sung then! Instead, you let them release the insurgent and drag you off to Calvary. You let them strip you naked – where's the victory there? Where's the dignity? You let them nail you to the Cross and then be left to slowly suffocate. That's not victorious! You let them mock you, hang a sarcastic sign over your head, torment you with temptation to summon High Heaven's Host – that would have shown them if you'd done that! Imagine their faces if Michael had been let loose there on Calvary; imagine if Gabriel had done his thing with the Chief Priests! That would have been victorious. Yet you forgave the centurion and his guard. You promised paradise to a good for nothing thief – you didn't even check he believed the right things.

And then you cried with anger, pain, and desolation, turning the ancient Psalm back on God, knowing you'd been forsaken. That's not victory.

What type of victory is that?

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, the Eternal Majesty,
source of all light and love, in whom we live, move, and have our being.

We believe in God, En-fleshed Word,
who proclaimed the coming Kingdom,
preached good news to the poor
and release to the captives.

**He healed the sick, bound up the broken hearted,
ate with outcasts, forgave sinners, and called all to repent and believe.**

Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was tortured, crucified, and made to suffer unimaginable pain.

**On the Cross Jesus defeated the powers of evil
that seek to rule our world.**

**God, the Eternal Majesty, raised Jesus from the dead,
vindicating his crucified victory.**

We believe in God, Abiding Spirit,
who calls us to be Church,
**who binds us together in the waters of baptism,
and who sustains through the Lord's Supper.**

We pray and work for the coming Kingdom,
and know, at the last, that God is our ultimate comfort in life and in death.
Amen.

Offering

Today we think of the paradox of money. Judas could not live with the reward for this treachery, and the priests could not easily use blood money; yet money as a means of exchange is necessary in our society. We know that the notes in our pocket have been used to pay for weapons, people, drugs, and misery yet also are used to relieve pain, bring joy and abundant life. Through giving we wean ourselves of our fear of having no money and give to causes greater than ourselves. Let us pray:

Eternal One, we ask you to bless our gifts,
of time, talent, and treasure, that we may use them wisely,
and that we may be freed from our need to worry,
and come to trust You, who count every hair on our heads. Amen.

Intercessions

As we learn how to serve,
we pray for a world at war
a world facing economic and environmental crisis,
and we beg for the turmoil of the world to cease.
Sitting in a sheep fold, we ask our Shepherd to lead us and guide us.
So, let us pray.

O Most High,
scatter the bad shepherds of your people;
those whose leadership brings harm,
those whose policies lead to oppression and torture,
and those whose ideologies cause poverty and division.

Raise up, O Gentle Shepherd,
leaders who will act as shepherds,
rulers who will serve,
and politicians who will seek the common good.

pause

O Jesus, our crucified King, we remember before You
all who are imprisoned and tortured,
all who seek to cling to life and love despite poor leadership,
and all who live in grinding poverty to stoke the engines of capital.

Inspire your people, O Christ,
to resist evil, usurp unjust power,
and find, in Your Cross, our redemption.

pause

O Gracious Spirit, in You we take refuge,
even though the earth shakes,
even though we live in troubled times,
and even though we live with fear and uncertainty.

Give us hope, Holy Spirit,
hope that evil and destruction do not have the last word,
hope that pain and evil will be transformed through the Cross-Throne of Christ,
and hope that you will never leave us.

pause

We remember now, Eternal One,
those we love and worry about

pause

those who have died whom we have loved

pause

those we pass in the street and see on the news

pause

those using our buildings every day

pause

lead us to serve, lead us to welcome, lead us, as we follow you,
and pray as you taught us, Our Father....

Blessing

As we have watched our wounded lover
suffer betrayal and unjust trial,
all for the love's sake,
be ready to defend the cause of justice in the face of tyranny.

As we have seen our wounded healer
be nailed to the Cross by human hatred,
be ready to love, even in the face of hate.

As we have seen our broken victor
die a death of ignoble nobility,
be prepared to live valiantly.

And the blessing of our almighty, yet crucified, God:

Father, Son	or	Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word
and Holy Spirit,		and Abiding Presence

be with you all, now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
O Worship the King All Glorious Above	47	127	113	528
The Lord Is King Lift Up Your Voice	76	129		656
Rejoice the Lord is King	657	449	335	575
Jesus shall Reign Where'er The Sun	269	470	328	379
Come People of the Risen King				1267
Meekness and Majesty		356	362	465
Heaven Shall Not Wait		362	701	
The Head That Once Was Crowned With Thorns	257	438	312	647
Jesus Remember Me		775	777	
Christ of God unseen the image		453		
How shall I sing that majesty?	661	128	53	
The Lord's My Shepherd I'll Not Want	679	14-16	480	660
The Lord's My Shepherd (Townend)			481	1008
The King of Love My Shepherd Is	552	462	479	649
Your Hand O God Has Guided	567	511	692	705
Hail to the Lord's Anointed	127	474	228	204
Crown Him With Many Crowns	262	459	347	109
Christ Triumphant Ever Reigning		436	319	77
Hear the Call of the Kingdom			407	1282
Sent By the Lord Am I		250	239	

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Music

Tracy Chapman's *Change*, which asks how we'd change if we knew this was our last day on earth, is a good track to gently start worship with whilst Michael Franti and Spearhead's track *Hey, hey, hey* asks some questions about good and evil and is an interesting track to end worship with. The Performing Rights Society waives any payment for music used in worship. You can find the pieces easily online.