

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 22nd November 2026
Christ the King
The Revd Angela Rigby

Call to Worship

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

**Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before God with joyful songs.**

Know that the LORD is God.

It is God who made us, and we are God's people, the sheep of God's pasture.

Enter God's gates and courts with praise. Say thank you to God.

**For the LORD is good and God's love endures forever;
God's faithfulness continues through all generations.**

from Psalm 100

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Holy God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit –
we praise you for your goodness
and thank you for your patience and mercy.

Creator God, the prophet Jeremiah tells us
that you are a God of justice, righteousness and kindness.
You are faithful from generation to generation.
You formed this world with love,
breathed your life into our bodies,
set us up as caretakers of creation,
and called everything good.
Yet God, we have failed to take care of your world.
We don't always love each other.
We are quick to see your image and breath in ourselves,
but fail to see your image and breath in others.
We sometimes bully and muscle our way
to capture resources for ourselves,
instead of looking out for those without strength
who we can share these resources with.

We look after who we perceive as our own flock
and fail to see all Your sheep,
and that the pasture is Yours, not ours.
God, for these sins and more, we are sorry.

Jesus – both the Lamb who gives us life
and the Good Shepherd who guides us
to good ways of living in community –
we pray you will have mercy on us
and lead us to ways of loving and caring for one another.

Holy Spirit,
help us to see the image of God imprinted on each other
and to recognise God's breath at work in one another.
Help us to declare "Jesus is King"
in a way that joyfully brings people together at your table,
rather than in a way that divides in fear.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear these words found in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 7:

"In Jesus Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us."

Be at peace with God and with one another.

Prayer for Illumination

Come, Holy Spirit, come.
Speak to us through the music, the prayers, the readings,
and through our reflection together.
May the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen

Readings

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 | St Matthew 25:31-46

All age introduction / activity

Here are three ideas to introduce the topic. Choose one.

Activity: Who decides?

You will need a bag of pick and mix, tub of sweets, bowl of variety of fruit or variety of biscuits – whatever your church fellowship will enjoy sharing afterwards. In front of everyone, start sorting the items according to your preference. Keep some and take some out. Decide on your reasons. Maybe you take something out because it is your favourite or least favourite? Maybe you decide to remove something because of the shape? As you remove things (which may be someone else's favourite), tell people why. In the end, you will end up with exactly what you want.

Or if you have a group who will join in, maybe choose a group to decide what will go in and what will be taken out? Ask them to explain why they made the decisions that they made.

Now ask the congregation if everyone is happy with the end result. Would everyone else have sorted it the same way you or the group did? Does everyone have the same preferences? If we are going to share these as a church, how do we decide what to include?

Explain that today we are thinking about Jesus as the one who decides. Sometimes we call today Christ the King Sunday or simply a time to think about Jesus being in control of our lives and our world.

Introduction: Two crowns

You will need a crown of thorns and a royal crown. You can add a shepherd's head covering if you want to. Show both crowns (careful with the thorns!). Both crowns of Jesus, but they tell us different things about Jesus. Ask them about what a crown of thorns tells us about Jesus. Ask them what a royal crown tells us about Jesus. Another metaphor for leader in the Bible is shepherd. Sometimes in the Bible a shepherd describes a person who leads a group of people, but in our readings today, the shepherd refers to God and ultimately to Jesus. You may wish to use the hymn "Meekness and Majesty" if you follow this theme.

Activity: Pictures of Jesus

If you have a pack like The Christ We Share (CMS, USPG, Methodist Church resource) or Face to Face with Jesus (St Clare's at the Cathedral resource), place different photos on display as prompts and either encourage a discussion about character of Jesus as a leader or ask people to write one or two words on a post it and place near the picture that they were drawn to in their reflection.

Sermon Notes

Both of these readings are words of hope and words of doom, depending on who you are and how you have been treating people. Good news is for everyone hearing these words,

there is time to take heed, repent, and change your actions and attitude towards others. Both readings invite the reader to consider who they may be following.

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Ezekiel was a prophet exiled in Babylon 597 BC. Ezekiel, meaning *God will Strengthen*, was written for a people experiencing exile. Just prior to our reading the shepherds – the former Kings of Israel – will be judged because they didn't take care of the people. In our reading today, we see that God is sorting scattered sheep in order to rescue His people. There are two types of sheep. One type is getting bigger, presumably by taking food and water resources – “pushing with flank and shoulder” – muscling their way in past the weaker sheep. The other type is growing weaker and weaker – under resourced and kept in a state of being under resourced. They are scattered and starving. This is the first of a series of messages leading up to the valley of the dry bones coming to life and being restored. God is about to act and rescue His people. God will shepherd the people and will set up a new David, a good shepherd who will look after the people with justice and righteousness. In our reading, we see the effect of bad leadership. You end up with people who bully and oppress others. A society of haves and have nots is created. You could link this to several topics happening today where inequality exists (see list of possible contextual links below).

St Matthew 25:31-46

This is the end of a series of teachings that starts in Matthew 24: 4-5 with Jesus saying, “Don't let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many.” Jesus warns them against false teachers and those proclaiming exactly when and how the end of the world will come about. We may have our own ideas about what false teachers look like, but the result of false teaching is clearly laid out in Jesus' warning. People will think they are following Jesus, but they will ignore the poor, the immigrant, the imprisoned, and the ill. They will fail to see Jesus in people. Jesus is clear. Those who are following the will of the King and are truly serving the King are those who look after the poor, the immigrant, the imprisoned, and the ill. Although the passage is about judgement, it is not saying that your works save you. It is saying that people teaching you to follow Jesus without caring about people are misleading you. Through this story about the Son of Man sorting sheep and goats, Jesus is warning them not to be misled. His followers need to be discerning about whose teaching they follow. Does the teaching match up with the ethos and priorities of King Jesus? Do we see Christ in others?

You may find this part of James helpful. In the letter of James 4: 14-17, we see early Christian teaching about the importance of our actions being changed by what we believe. Salvation does not come from what we do. Salvation is from God through Jesus. However, what we do should be a reflection of our salvation.

Note: This part of Matthew 25 is being fiercely debated by Christians in American politics, with some saying the story calls nations to act better towards the under resourced, the poor, the immigrant, the sick and imprisoned. Others argue that this teaching only applies to individuals and not governments. If you have folks within your fellowship who empathise with Christian nationalism and American conservative Christian teaching, it may help you to be aware of this debate. However you interpret it, there are other parts of scripture where God clearly judges whole nations for how they treat the poor and the immigrant, so you may find it helpful to draw upon those if you decide to take this approach.

Possible contextual links: UK politics and Christian nationalism, racial justice and systemic racism, social class and economic structures, food poverty, AI, climate change and effects on people around the world, how we treat people in our church and community, preparing for Advent and following Christ more closely.

Prayers of intercession for the World

Holy God,
Christ once wore a crown of thorns.
He suffered for his beliefs and for the way he lived his life.
He taught of kindness and mercy that is unearned.
He turned over tables of injustice in the place of worship.
Whilst the Empire cheered its military might,
Jesus paraded into town in peace as he rode a donkey.
The crown of thorns was intended to mock him and cause him pain,
but nothing would compare to the pain he felt
as he took the cup and as his body was broken for the sin of the world.
God, we pray for those who are still crushed by the sin in our world.

Silence

Injustice could not crush Christ.
Death was not the end.
Christ now reigns in Heaven
and is seated by Father God's side, interceding for us.
God, we pray for those situations and people
that we are aware of that need Your renewal and resurrection power.

Silence

Holy God, we bring all our prayers
together as we share the prayer Jesus taught, saying, Our Father...

Offering

Jesus gave of his time, love, and abilities as he listened to the outcast, welcomed the stranger, and healed the sick. His kingship was marked by service not status, Passion not pomp, teaching not tyranny. As followers of this king, we seek to emulate his example and give to those in need - not those we feel are deserving. Our giving supports the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the imprisoned. We use our time to support causes and people in need. Our love supports the lonely and isolated, the sad and despondent. Our abilities are used in Christ's service in any number of ways. And, as Christians we are called to show our giving in financial ways – through supporting a range of charities and good causes and through giving to the Church – via the plate or the bank, through time, love, and ability. So, we give thanks for all that is given in the Kingdom's causes:

Christ our King, bless all that is given in this place,
gifts of time, gifts of love, gifts of ability,
that the hungry may be fed, the thirsty given drink,
the naked clothed and the imprisoned freed,
that your Kingdom may come. Amen.

Blessing

May God bless us with wonder, curiosity, and questions.
May God bless us with open hands and fearless hearts.
And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
All people that on earth do dwell	712	63	1	20
As the Deer Pants		550	544	37
Crown Him with Many Crowns	262	459	347	109
God is love, his the care	274	193	403	
Jesus Christ is waiting		360	251	
Jesus shall reign where'er the sun	269	470	328	379
O Jesus I have promised	509	644	563	501
There's a spirit in the air	329	616	398	
Where can we find you, Lord Jesus			672	
When I needed a neighbour		544	256	
The Lord's My Shepherd			481	1008