

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 23 November 2025 – The Sunday before Advent / Christ the King

Lectionary Readings (*depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on*)

Jeremiah 23.1–6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1.11–20; Luke 23.33–43

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Rachel Rosborough, Vice Principal, Westcott House

For the last three years, we have had a King as our monarch. I wonder what image springs to mind when you think of a king. When King Charles acceded to the throne, there was a lot of talk about him ushering in a new era of the monarchy, a simpler, stripped back kind of monarchy.

For many of us, having a king on the throne is an unusual thing. For over 70 years, much of most people's life, we had a queen. So, when you think of a king, what springs to mind – Charles III, or something else. He was Prince Charles for so long. Perhaps instead you find yourself thinking of the kings of history, like Henry the eighth. Figures of wealth, power, splendour, influence and authority.

Today we ponder Christ the King, the feast that falls on the last Sunday of the church year, before the new advent year starts. And our reading(s) cause us to ponder kingship, this time the kingship of Jesus.

There are a number of places in scripture where we are offered a picture of Christ the King of the world, not least in Colossians 1:13-20 (which we heard read this morning) describing him as the supreme, the firstborn, the image of God himself, the one through whom, and for whom, everything was created – thrones, powers, rulers, authorities, the head. Christ the King, king of majesty, the all-powerful one before whom we must merely bend the knee and bow down. Maybe exactly the picture we would expect of a king, and not unlike our monarch – a symbol of power, wealth, authority.

But is that all? Is that the only picture we get of Christ the King? Is Jesus merely the ultimate example of power and status, some kind of spiritual super-king, before whom we must bow to his power and authority?

Much of our worship may stem from this understanding of an all-powerful King of heaven but there is more.

Our gospel reading from Luke offers a very different picture, a challenging and bewildering picture, a picture which is certainly not what we would expect as an illustration of kingship. No fine robes but a naked and wounded body, a crown not of gold and precious jewels but of thorns, hands are not adorned with rings of power but nails fixing him to a wooden

cross, no mighty throne. There are no courtiers or servants around him instead two criminals sharing his fate and an assorted crowd of soldiers and spectators who taunt and mock.

And above his head the cruel humiliating sign, this is the king of the Jews. A proclamation, or perhaps an incredulous question. A bleak picture of a dying man. Where is his power now?

And of course, this image can never for us quite hold the helplessness and hopelessness of those first followers of Christ as we stand with two thousand or more years of Christian history behind us. We know it was not the end, we know that despite this bleak image of Christ on a cross, we do and can indeed still celebrate Christ as King, risen, ascended and glorified.

Verses from Colossians and elsewhere remind us of Christ the King that is and always has been, the image of God, the head, the supreme – and that must cause us to bow in worship and reverence.

Our Christian heritage reminds us of Christ the Risen King, powerful in defeating even death and that too should cause us to fall again in worship and praise at his power and majesty. Christ the King

But what about that image from Luke's gospel? The Good Friday image of a broken, dying, bleeding, hopeless and helpless Christ?

It is here we catch a glimpse of the other side of Christ the King, the King who is not about greatness and might and power and heaven – and therefore perhaps out of our grasp. Instead we see Christ the King who suffers alongside other human beings, not aloof from the ordinary but a King who knows what it is to experience life in this world, even betrayal and pain, cruelty and injustice, loneliness and death and uses his power to go through this for us and with us. And that is what brings hope, what brings peace, what shows us the true love of God, that shows us his transformative power and love that can even whisper in the shadow of death to a thief beside him, today you will be with me in paradise. As the king of kings is being treated like a common thief, he treats the common thief beside him like a king.

Yes, there is a sense in which we must recognise Jesus as King over all creation, Lord of all life and respond on bended knee and with humble worship and praise, but there is also something else. A king who was surprising, shocking, baffling, bewildering and deeply human. A king with a crown not of gold but of thorns. A king not of the horse and chariot but of the donkey. A king not of the rich and famous and successful but of the tax collector, sinner, ordinary fisherman and criminal. A king not of the most glorious palace but of the ordinary stable. A king not of the sword but the cross. A king of might and power, God himself, from the heights of heaven, also a king of love and service, humanity in full, even to the depths of the grave. Christ the king.

The joy of today and the big theology we must somehow grasp is that we need this kind of king. The king of eternity, heaven, creation, the supreme one, beyond our understanding and worthy of our praise. But also, the king of Luke chapter 23, the king of the here and now, of earth, of brokenness and pain, even in death, showing us the ultimate sacrifice of love and service.

Together they paint us a picture of one who unites the heights of heaven with the depths of the grave, the bleakness, ordinariness and reality of now, with the hope and salvation and reconciliation of the eternal kingdom of God. Amen

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Some of you might know the children's song 'Our God is a Great Big God'. The words of the chorus are 'Our God is a great big God and he holds us in his hand'. This captures something of what we have been exploring today and we are going to use it in our intercessions.

Our God is a Great Big God – that's the big God, the God of heaven, of eternity, of majesty and power, perhaps a bit hard to grasp, but who draws us to worship in wonder. Our God is Great big God - but he holds us in his hand. He holds us in his hand. That's the God of Luke's gospel, the God who is right here with us, the man, the one who experiences our pain and our struggle, our ordinariness. Somehow we have a God who is both. And as we come before him on bended knee, head bowed kneeling before him in wonder, we might just find that instead of being on the throne of heaven, he is kneeling next to us, weeping as we weep and rejoicing as our hearts sing. Christ the King.

As we pray, we are going to use those words by way of a response, when I say, 'Our God is a great big God', please respond with 'and he holds us in his hand'.

Our God is a great big God

All **And he holds us in his hand**

We pray for world leaders: that they may really listen to their people and follow Jesus's example of service, love, attention to the outcast or excluded and help for all who are in need. Come to them Lord Jesus as King of Kings and bring transformation. Use us to show your love, healing and hope.

Our God is a great big God

All **And he holds us in his hand**

We pray for all people around the world, especially those who are poor, those who are abused or unloved, those who face fear, terror or persecution, those who are sick or struggling. May they know your presence with them, and your healing and hope.

Our God is a great big God

All **And he holds us in his hand**

We pray for our parish, families and friends. We thank you for all the people here who bring life to this church and community. We pray that that each of us would listen to others and to Jesus, follow in his footsteps and be quick to be the people of Christ the King.

Our God is a great big God

All **And he holds us in his hand**

Christ our King, help us to be like you, to listen to your truth and to see that all people are important, no matter who they are or where they come from. Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

Crown Him with many crowns

The Servant King

Our God is a Great Big God

Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice

Make Way, Make Way

All Heaven Declares

Praise My Soul the King of Heaven

All Hail the Power of Jesus Name

The Head that once was crowned with thorns

Rejoice the Lord is King

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)