

WORSHIP AT HOME – 22ND NOVEMBER 2020

CHRIST THE KING

Dear Friends

I hope this Worship at Home finds you well and coping with lockdown. We pray that, if everyone tries to follow the way set out, that the virus can be gradually tamed and life can return to normal – even though that may need to be a ‘new normal’.

Today we celebrate the kingship of Jesus – the royalty of Christ – and we remember that, in the end, it is by what he values that our lives will be judged. We remember that he comes to us in the shape of the people who are most in need in our world. Time to ask ourselves how we have responded – and to give thanks for the many opportunities we have to serve Christ through serving others.

Every blessing. *Margaret*

Call to Worship: Let us worship the Lord Jesus, King of kings yet servant of all. Let us hold before him our dreams, our longings, our hopes, and the names of those who on our hearts today to seek blessing and healing.

Gracious God, we come before you in thanksgiving for the self-giving love of your Son. Inspired by his example may we be generous and giving, looking for no reward other than knowing that we are doing your will. We ask this in Jesus’ name. **Amen**

The words to ‘Thou didst leave thy throne’ written by Emily Elizabeth Steele Elliott [1836-1897]. Hymns and Psalms 154:

1 Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown when thou camest to earth for me,
But in Bethlehem’s home was there found no room for thy holy nativity.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus! There is room in my heart for thee.

2 Heaven’s arches rang when the angels sang, proclaiming thy royal degree.
But of lowly birth cam’st thou, Lord, on earth, and in great humility.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus! There is room in my heart for thee

3 The foxes found rest, and the bird its nest in the shade of the cedar tree;
But thy couch was the sod, o thou Son of God, in the deserts of Galilee.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus! There is room in my heart for thee.

4 Thou camest, O Lord, with the living word that should set thy people free;
But, with mocking scorn, and with crown of thorn, they bore thee to Calvary.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus! Thy cross is my only plea.

5 When heaven’s arches ring and her choirs shall sing at thy coming in victory,
Let thy voice call me home, saying, ‘Yet there is room, there is room at my side for thee!’
And my heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus, when thou comest and callest for me.

Prayer: Almighty God, yours is the earth and all that is in it – the valleys, mountains, seas and spray – the land, the pastures, the trees and fauna. All around us we see stories of your bounty, your exuberant goodness and your flourishing provision.

You have made us to live here, nurtured by this earth, and by work. We find joy in this vocation to be your people – living, working, resting and supporting. We thank you for the gifts of living and for these gifts of bounty all around us.

Yet, Lord, we must confess to you that there have been times when we have seen the broken and yet not have been moved to compassion. Times when we may have heard people mourning yet have not given them our time – sometimes we may have witnessed oppression, yet have not raised our voices against it, maybe through our own fear. There have been times when we have seen the stranger yet have not said a word of welcome.

God, hiding in strangers all around us, we are truly sorry for what we have done and what we have not done; and we ask you to deepen your welcome in us, so that we might deepen our welcome around us.

We pray in the precious name of Jesus, **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer: 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 forever and ever Amen

The Old Testament and Gospel readings today outline a duty of care – but it is not one-sided. In Ezekiel, care is given and enacted by God to a vulnerable and hurting people in exile; whereas, in Matthew, the challenge is for God's people to be like him in caring and reaching out to the vulnerable and the exposed. One of the functions of the 'Son of Man' is to draw attention to the humanity of God. In both passages the exiles and the people waiting for the Son to return [a different sort of exile] need to be confident in the presence of God in their world. The judgement call for both is how to show this confidence in their wider network of relationships.

Old Testament passage is Ezekiel 34: 11-16 and 20-24 and is taken from The New Living Translation Bible.

The Good Shepherd: For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search and find my sheep. I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. I will bring them back home to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers and in all the places where people live. Yes, I will give them good pastureland on the high hills of Israel. There they will lie down in pleasant places and feed in the lush pastures of the hills. I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign Lord. I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them – yes, I will feed them justice. Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will surely judge between the fat sheep and the scrawny sheep. For you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded my sick and hungry flock until you scattered them to distant lands. So I will rescue my flock, and they will no longer be abused. I will judge between one animal of the flock and another. And I will set over them one shepherd – my servant David. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be a prince among my people. I, the Lord, have spoken.

Comment:

The greatness of God is shown here in his capacity to find, protect, provide for and guide God's people. God is presented as an alternative shepherd of the flock – one who is diligent and compassionate - one who will gather those who have been scattered and provide sustenance for them.

This is in contrast to those who establish themselves as leaders but who then exercise an unjust form of power and control.

The metaphor gets somewhat mixed here as it appears that the unjust leaders actually come from the flock themselves, so it could be seen that God is judging the leaders of Israel and not the sheep.

Ezekiel the prophet proclaims the humility of the Servant King, whose mercy and loving kindness soothes aching souls and reassures us all. It isn't that sin is excused or ignored, but that God longs to mend whatever is broken in us, and gather us up, even after our own foolishness has caused our problems. An image, then, of us belonging to God and his kingdom as sheep belong to the shepherd and his pasture. As in the Gospel, however, he will judge those who have been caring and compassionate to others and also those who have been selfish and uncaring.

The passage from the Gospel is Matthew 25: 31-46 and is taken from New Living Translation Bible.

The Final Judgement: The Sheep and the Goats.

But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you invited me into your home. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

Then these righteous ones will reply: 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you were doing it to me.'

Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty and you didn't give me a drink. I was a stranger and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison and you didn't visit me.'

Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?'

And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."

Comment: A very clear message from the Old Testament passage which is reiterated by Jesus' parable in the Gospel, telling us what will happen when the Son of Man comes in glory. Christ the King will separate the sheep from the goats – or as Ezekiel put it, between fat sheep and the scrawny.

Christ the King will welcome the sheep on his right hand and offer them the kingdom that has been prepared for them since the creation of the world. This in itself is a wonderful thought, isn't it! A place reserved for each of us from the beginning. A place that is just yours with your name on it. But, of course, there is a judgement and that is about love. If we have shown love and compassion and care to others, we need not fear. 'Just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Time and again we learn that the way we deal with others is the way we deal with God. As David Adam, one time vicar of Lindisfarne, puts it: 'If we do not listen to others, we are not likely to listen to God. If we are mean towards others, we have a mean relationship with God. If we only like people who will obey us, we will seek a puppet God. Our faith is not one that is out of this world; our faith is reflected in our relationships with each other as well as with God.'

As God is hidden in each person – and sometimes hidden very deeply so that we find it hard to see – we have to treat everyone with reverence and respect. There is no one single person who does not have God hidden within, even though they may live in total disobedience to him. The criminal has no less of God within him than the saint. We probably find that hard to come to terms with as we look around at the

world, as we look back into history – but God is there, however we might feel. It is why we are all precious to him and so, hard as we might sometimes find it, all should be precious to us and where we see need it is our calling to care for it as we can. No one of us can do everything but we can strive to serve God and others as well as we can.

It can be hard to be caring towards some people we come across – but then, who said that being a Christian and following the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself was easy!?

The words to ‘All for Jesus’ written by W.J. Sparrow-Simpson [1859-1952]. Singing the Faith 341

1 All for Jesus – all for Jesus, this our song shall ever be:

For we have no hope, nor Saviour, if we have not hope in thee.

2 All for Jesus – thou wilt give us strength to serve thee hour by hour;

None can move us from thy presence while we trust thy love and power.

3 All for Jesus – thou hast loved us; all for Jesus – thou hast died;

All for Jesus – thou art with us; all for Jesus crucified.

4 All for Jesus – all for Jesus – this the Church’s song must be;

Till, at last, we all are gathered one in love and one in thee.

Prayer: Lord, we pray for those who sit in prison cells; we pray for the animals sitting in tiny cages; we pray for the lonely who sit and await a visit; and especially now, Lord, when the restrictions set in place to halt a virus mean that visits cannot take place and so many long to be able to visit or to be visited; and we pray for the sick who wait for comfort and relief.

We pray for those people who do visit the forgotten; those who free the trapped; those who bring joy to the downhearted- all who speak words of hope.

Loving God, bless each and every one with the courage of your Son, and unite us in our mutual need and caring.

Lord, give us hands to set prisoners free with hearts that love, and eyes that see the needs of those who sit alone- those who wait and those who groan.

Give us feet to go where illness reigns, and words to speak to those in pain; may we bring hope to everyone and heal and help through your dear Son.

This is our prayer, Lord, hear us now and guide our path, and show us how to be your church through thick and thin with open doors to welcome in the sheep and goats, the lost and sad, the rich and poor, the good and bad. For we’re all both, and need from you huge love and grace to see us through. **Amen**

Illustration written by David Adam: Eddie wanted to serve the King. He wanted to go up to the palace and give himself to serve the King, but he was held up. First he had to look after his ageing parents. Eventually, when he set off he had a gift for the King - but on the way he met a poor family who had been robbed of their belongings so he gave the gift to them. Later on he met a family whose cart had stuck deep in the mud. He stayed to help them and he got sprayed with mud himself. Now he had no gift for the King, and his fine clothes were filthy. He felt he couldn’t journey on like that, but something encouraged him to keep going – words he had heard long ago.

When he finally reached the palace he received a royal welcome. He was about to apologise for the state he was in but the King said: ‘You have been a sterling help to me over the years, in the way you cared for your parents, in the way you gave to the poor and when you helped those who were in need. I was there and it was me to whom you gave your help and love. Welcome to the fullness of the kingdom which you have served for a long time.

A Meditation of Simon the Zealot written by Nick Fawcett:

Hang on – this doesn't make sense, for he was talking about a *king* just now – the Son of Man enthroned in glory – only suddenly he's become, the poor, the homeless, the hungry. Not just one of the weak but the lowest of the low.

What's going on? Did I miss something? Or did he mean what he said?

He can't do, surely, for they are poles apart – couldn't be more different.

Yet somehow, strangely, he claims they are the same.

He wants us to serve – I get that, after all it's what other rulers expect. Only usually that means serving *them*, not *others* – but Jesus is asking for both, suggesting you can't have one without the other, almost as if he doesn't just *care* about us but he actually *feels* our pain, our need, our sorrow.

You'd almost think, to hear him talk, that *he's* the servant, ready to stand in our place, suffer what's rightly ours. But that's ridiculous, of course, for what sort of king would do that?

No, he must mean something else, but I can't imagine what. *Can you?*

Saviour Christ, help us to worship you as King of kings yet servant of all – as Lord of lords yet broken on a cross – as lifted high yet brought low – as giver of life yet enduring death. Teach us what your way involves – what your kingdom means – what your victory cost – and grant us the humility and love we need in turn to be ready to serve rather than be served. Help us to walk your way of unassuming commitment, faithful to the end. In your holy and precious name we pray **Amen**

The words to 'Rejoice, the Lord is King' written by Charles Wesley [1707-1788]. Singing the Faith 335

1 Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore;

Mortals give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore.

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

2 Jesus the Saviour reigns, the God of truth and love;

When he had purged our stains, he took his seat above.

Lift up.....

3 His kingdom cannot fail, he rules both earth and heaven;

The keys of death and hell are to our Jesus given.

Lift up.....

4 He sits at God's right hand till all his foes submit,

And bow to his command and fall beneath his feet.

Lift up.....

5 Rejoice in glorious hope; Jesus the Judge shall come,

And take his servants up to his eternal throne.

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

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Look into your heart, and know that the Lord is with you.

Look out to the world, and serve her needs.

Look up to those who are icons of hope.

Look down to the ground where you walk, for it is holy.

Go in peace and be useful In Jesus' name.

May the grace of our Lord and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all and with those whom we serve forever more. **Amen**