

Dear friends,

Here we are at the end of the Church year when we use the theme of Christ the King – and our reading today is to be considered in that context.

It doesn't seem possible, does it, that we have reached this point when the lectionary rolls over and that from next week we shall be in year A of the lectionary once again. Neither does it seem possible that, since this Worship at Home series began in March 2020, we have nearly completed two full rounds of the lectionary years A to C! How time passes. As always, however, I keep you in my thoughts and prayers and wish you every blessing. Margaret

Call to Worship:

Invisible One, we look for you.

The cross is empty: come to us now.

Reconciling One, we need you.

The cross is empty: come to us now.

God, our refuge and strength, we are still – we are waiting.

Come to us now. Amen.

[Based on Psalm 46]

God is where we are living.

See what God is doing here. God settles disputes and makes right our relationships.

We can find a home in God.

God is always ready to help us.

We can put our fears aside if we trust God: even when the world around is changing quickly.

We can find a home in God.

The things God does are amazing.

With the area where we live founded on God we will not be afraid.

We will be full of joy and celebrate right here.

We have a home in God, our refuge and our strength. Amen.

The words to 'Crown him with many crowns' written by Matthew Bridges [1800-1894] and Godfrey Thring [1823-1903]

Singing the Faith 347

1 Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne.

Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.

Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,

and hail him as thy matchless King through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Son of God, before the worlds began;

and ye who tread where he has trod, crown him the Son of Man,

who every grief has known that wrings the human breast,

and takes and bears them for his own, that all in him may rest.

3 Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave,

and rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save.

His glories now we sing, who died and rose on high;

Who died, eternal life to bring, and lives, that death may die.

4 Crown him the Lord of peace, whose power a sceptre sways

from pole to pole, that wars may cease, absorbed in prayer and praise.

His reign shall know no end, and round his pierced feet
fair flowers of paradise extend their fragrance ever sweet.

5 Crown him the Lord of love; behold his hands and side –
rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified.
All hail Redeemer, hail! for thou hast died for me;
thy praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity.

Prayer including Lord's Prayer:

Sovereign protector – lord almighty – judge eternal – heavenly Father, ruler of creation – every name we
give you highlights your character and your glory.

Gracious God, full of compassion – lord of all hopefulness – light of the world – king of glory, king of
peace – everything about you is wonderful and amazing. We bow our heads and hearts before you in
adoration.

Loving God, you have sent your son Jesus, who is the Christ, the Messiah, to be with us in all that we
do and in all that we experience, so that through him we might know you and love you, with all our
heart, soul, mind and strength.

And yet, even though we know that he has loved us to the uttermost as you love us, with sorrow and
regret we confess our failings, our shortcomings and our doubts.

We need your forgiveness, your compassion and your reassurance.

We seek to do better, to turn around and face you and the needs of those around us.

Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.

The Lord our God hears our words, spoken and unspoken.

The Lord our God knows us inside out – he forgives us, redeems us and renews us – lifts our burdens
and send us on our way.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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.

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Today we are standing at the end of the Christian year, while standing on the cusp of a new one.
Liturgically, we are asked to consider our prejudices and misplaced priorities, and to look instead for
similarity and equality with others under the unifying of Christ the King. Our ancestors envisioned the
year as a wheel or a circle. The centre of a wheel is a 'hub' – the centre of a circle is called the 'origin'.
Christ refers to himself as 'origin', using the word 'Alpha'. He invites us to make him our centre.
So at this still point between the ebb of the old year and the flow of the new one, can we take some
time to consider what that might mean for us?

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**Luke 23: 33-43 – taken from Holy Bible – New Living Translation, copyright 1996 and used by
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Finally they came to a place called The Skull. All three were crucified there – Jesus on the centre cross,
and the two criminals on either side.

Jesus said: 'Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing.' And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

The crowd watched, and the leaders laughed and scoffed. 'He saved others,' they said, 'let him save himself if he is really God's Chosen One, the Messiah.'

The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of soured wine. They called out to him: 'if you are the King of the Jews save yourself!' A signboard was nailed to the cross above him with these words: 'this is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed: 'So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself – and us, too, while you're at it!'

But the other criminal protested: 'Don't you fear God even when you are dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done anything wrong.' Then he said: 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.'

And Jesus replied: 'I assure you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Comment: this passage is at the heart of the crucifixion story with its accounts of the two who were crucified alongside Jesus and the mocking of the soldiers and one of those crucified with him. Verse 35 distinguishes between the people who watched and the leaders who scoffed. Jesus is mocked as King. A king should be able to save himself from this dreadful fate – but this king saves others only by not saving himself. His authority is found in the powerlessness of the cross.

In Luke's account the kingship of Christ is a cause of mockery rather than of triumph. Yet for us, the one who is lifted up on the cross is also lifted up in our hearts as Lord and King. For, however hard we may struggle with theologies of atonement, we are clear that in his dying and rising is the key to all great issues of pain and tragedy, of good and evil, and above all, of the power of God who comes to us as Jesus. So it is the Son of Mary, God Incarnate, who hangs of the cross, who endures the mockery, who forgives and makes promises. Notwithstanding appearances, this is actually a story of triumph not of defeat. It is the triumph of weakness over strength. It is a triumph which reverses all the world's values, even those which define kingship itself.

In this passage we also find Jesus' word of forgiveness from the cross. (Apparently this verse is left out of some manuscripts because a copyist was unable to credit the notion that Jesus could forgive the Jews who had brought him to this place) here, too, uniquely in Luke's account, the story of the so-called penitent thief: 'We are getting what we deserve – but this man has done nothing wrong'.

Here, in Luke's account of the crucifixion, Jesus remains in control despite the pain and brutality of his execution. He is uniting people, forgiving them and reconciling them to God even as he dies on the cross. The charge above him: This is the King of the Jews', and the mocking voices contrast the tortured, dying man with their idea of what a king or God's chosen saviour, the Messiah, should be.

For them, kingship and messiahship involve, most of all, the power to save yourself from harm.

The Gospel invites us to wonder at what it means to have a king who chooses *not* to save himself in order that others may be saved. What does it mean to have a king whose throne is a cross?

Prayer:

Father, we pray for the world, remembering with sadness the divisions and the bitterness we see. And we remember particularly the anger, hatred and distrust in so many areas where there are warring factions.

We pray, bring an end to the selfishness of the people of the world and a beginning of love and hope.

Father, we pray for our own country, remembering the divisions of class and culture, of age and gender, of the 'haves' and 'have nots'. We think of the vandalism, selfishness and self-interest in many areas of the nation's life, where groups fight only for their own interests. We pray for the Trades Unions – for management and for governments of all hues, which sometimes seem to care so little about the impact of their decisions and actions on the lives of ordinary people. We pray, bring an end to greed and indifference wherever it may be, and bring a beginning of justice and sharing.

Father, we pray for the church. We are called to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth and the body of Christ, yet we know how often we fail. We forget the importance of prayer, of reading your word, of worship – and we know that we are called to spend more time serving our community and caring for others. We pray, bring an end to our disobedience and help us to trust.

Father, we pray for people, remembering all those who are ill, distressed, broken or under stress. We pray for those who are unemployed or are struggling in their work. We also remember those who are worried, anxious, afraid or lost – and we bring before you now any whom we know by name.....

We pray, bring an end to all that spoils their lives and a beginning of real hope.

Father, we pray for ourselves. We remember our uncertainties and confusion – our lack of hope and the weakness of our faith. We bring before you all that we are facing right now, and all that we will be facing in the coming week. We ask you to help us realise over again that deep within the world, and within life itself, there is God-given purpose; there is an end, a destination for our lives. We pray, help us so to prepare, so to live and to respond to you, that at the end of things we may share in Christ's completion of his work.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers – for we ask them in the name of Jesus Christ, the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Amen.

Based on a prayer written by David Clowes and found in his '500 Prayers for All Occasions'; published by David C. Cook, Kingsway Communications LTD. 2003

In daily events, the rush to work, getting the kids to school, meeting deadlines, getting to appointments on time, making ends meet, it's so easy to pass you by and never even see you.

In our times alone, cooking, watching TV, at the gym, out on a drive, sitting at the computer, reading the paper, walking the dog - it's so easy to ignore you, cut you out, delete the message, switch off from you.

In the social round of church life, in its committees and meetings, in all the little jobs and rotas and routines, in the pressure to fundraise and keep things going - it's so easy to forget you, to sideline you, to worship what we believe rather than worship you.

Lord, forgive us for crowding you out. Amen. [M. M. Moxon 2004]

Close

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

As we go on into the coming week, help us to carry in our thoughts all who need refuge and safety from threat, including those fleeing war and dangerous situations.

Let us pray for those suffering because of damaged environments.

Help us to be mindful of how our actions impact others.

Thank you for being our place of refuge – our king of a turning world. Amen.

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