

Morning Praise @ Home 26th November 2023

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
cf Psalm 51

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Reading

Matthew 25: 31 – 46

Reflection from Sue

Christ the King

Many of us have been troubled by the wars that have characterised this year – powerful oppressors with military might seeking to obliterate another's homeland. There's surely no justice in innocent civilians of either side being caught up in such suffering. The heaviness of our hearts reflects part of God's image within us that wants things to be set right in the world, wants things to be fair. We want evil to be halted, wrongdoers to be punished and liars exposed.

Almost every Christian has periods when they're downcast at the way the world goes. Whilst human suffering, pitiless arrogance and the taint of evil infiltrate the world we live in, it's harder to understand that God is in charge and will sort everything out – but He is and He will.

Some of us may be taking grandchildren to the panto this Christmas. They are probably looking forward to it. Perhaps back in September you made a booking, then were required to commit your cash. Now you've got your tickets and just want the promise of the advertising to become a reality. But you've got to hold on until the date you booked arrives.

Our passage from Matthew talks of a time that all Christians should look forward to, when the reward of those who are faithful to God's ways is realised, selfishness is utterly defeated and righteousness becomes a reality. And like your panto booking, it is fixed for a specific time in the future. Jesus says: 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.' ... It will happen at a point that human history is leading toward – but it hasn't happened yet. We've got to hold on.

As God says in Ps 75: 'I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge with equity.' ... At that point all of humanity will come before Christ's throne, as He judges the actions of the people for whom He died. That this hasn't happened yet is because God is waiting for all humankind to have the chance to develop a relationship with His Son.

Today in the church calendar we celebrate that Christ is enthroned as King. Ultimately, 'All the nations will be gathered before Him', says v.32 of our reading. That means everyone on earth will come before His judgement. The Bible tells us that the tiny baby Jesus we will be honouring this Christmas is also the ultimate Lord over every aspect of the world He entered.

As we declare in the Gloria, 'seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus alone is the Holy One, He alone is the Lord, He alone is the Most High, Jesus Christ'. And it is on the basis of how each person has responded to Jesus' sacrificial death for their sins, which determines whether they stand or fall before God. Jesus alone has the right to award 'eternal reward', or 'eternal doom'.

The kindly suggestion that somehow it will all be OK for everyone in the end, regardless of how they have behaved or what they have worshipped, in reality demonstrates our failure to love those who are heading in the wrong direction. Jesus warns us in v.46 that people won't all end up in the same place, having followed different paths. That is why every one of us has a responsibility to witness to our non-believing family, friends and colleagues. Isn't their salvation as important as our own?

If the concept of this judgement is a difficult idea to swallow, we may need to recall a few truths:

1. God has given His Son the right to decide what is acceptable and what is not, because Jesus has done everything necessary to rescue us. Through His death on the Cross, Christ
 - released the world from the grip of sin and death
 - enabled us to be forgiven and reconciled with our Maker, to enjoy eternal union with Him
 - and initiated the new creation, where we can all become Christ-like, re-created and made holy, so as to live out our calling as Jesus' friends.
2. For our part, through baptism and confirmation, haven't we promised to be faithful to Him, to obey His word and embody the life of righteous love that He modelled for us?

Knowing this, we are called to live right now the way Jesus showed us.

You see, our lives are seen and noticed by God. We are precious to him. Whilst we are free to live as we choose, we can't expect Him not to care about the choices we make, just as we are concerned about the choices our own children make, even when they are grown up!

Our choices will be judged. Jesus' reign has already started and He cares about people suffering. Because of His compassion, He will hold us all to account on the vulnerable's behalf. The God who will not tolerate the world's evil is also the God who is ashamed of our un-Christ-like behaviour.

If we know that the Lord judges His world and will establish justice, what should we be doing about it as His heirs now? Surely we too need to take a stand against oppression and violence, against exploitation, against selfish gain at the expense of others. In practical terms:

- This means responding with compassion to refugees, and opposing the corrupt systems which have generated them
- It means not gobbling up the world's resources and leaving poorer nations to get by on the remnants
- It means being generous with our personal and corporate resources, so as to benefit our wider communities, rather than just our immediate families and fellowship.

Running counter to our 'Me, me, me' culture, living out our faith is always about pointing towards Jesus – proclaiming who He is, demonstrating the love and compassion by which He operates.

Don't we believe in a generous God, a God who gave up everything for us and gave us everything we could ever need? Well, God calls us to be generous in response to this generosity and to share it with others. We should not see the gifts we have (either personally or as a church) as ours to be kept hold of, but rather as God's. As Philip's sermon last week reminded us, we are called to develop those gifts and to generously utilise them.

When I taught A Level English Lit, I recall students asking me to predict what questions would come up in the exam, based on recent papers. They wanted to know what they had to be ready for, although I always told them that I just couldn't be certain.

However, none of us here can claim not to know how we should be behaving as Jesus' followers. We have been provided with lots of guidance and examples of what this involves, in the Bible, through the lived example of Jesus and by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit within us, empowering us to live His way rather than our own.

This passage from Matthew is just one, very clear example of what Christ will be judging us on. He commends those who:

- offer basic care to the vulnerable, feeding and clothing them
- offer relationship and inclusion to those they hardly know
- provide healing and restoration to the sick and outcast.

Before we moved here, I had friends who supported the work of Christians Against Poverty, whose aim is to help people escape the burden of debt, by careful financial management and teaching life skills. Meanwhile I engaged with our local Trussell Trust foodbank, to which professionals recommend those who are facing food poverty, all carefully monitored so that the system is fair. Both are Christian ministries which embody the principles Jesus proclaims here.

When He lived on earth, Jesus was Himself poor and of no fixed abode. He identified with those struggling economically, those who were weighed down by life's problems. If we care about Him, He wants us to care about them, generously sharing our time, talents and finance.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; Why? Whenever you showed practical love, generosity and compassion to someone overlooked or ignored,—you did it to King Jesus. And therefore you can take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"

The Lord is asking that you and I help redress the imbalances we see in our society. As citizens of His loving and just Kingdom we need to uphold those same values. In serving others we are serving His purposes.

Nothing goes under God's radar. At the end of time, an end which Jesus will personally be wrapping up, everyone and everything will be confronted with Christ the King.

For now, although Jesus has opened the gateway, and His love is urging all humankind to walk through into new life, it is still up to the world, to each one of us, to choose to serve this King.

He's shown us what He is looking for. Generous care for the disadvantaged is part of our final exam. And, unlike A Levels, there will be no opportunity for a re-sit.

AMEN

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession led by John

Christ our true and humble King,
we pray for the kingdoms, republics and dictatorships of the world:
where there is violence, injustice, poverty and exclusion, may your peaceable and just Kingdom come.
We pray for monarchs, politicians and heads of state, that they will discover you in the ways of service and love.
We pray for political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, like you, caught up in state violence; we particularly pray for those who are imprisoned in Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Gaza at this time.
Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Christ our King,
we pray for your church, that it may embody the Gospel, that it will be a place of the kingdom,
marked by care, love and welcome for vulnerable people, a place of, generosity, joy and hope,
a place where people can grow in faith and in the service of others.
We pray for all who take on Christian leadership that they will always carry the hallmarks of your own in service, humility and care for the poorest and most vulnerable.
Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Christ our King,
you knew weakness, pain and distress.
We pray for all who suffer today in hospitals and hospices or at home: in times of suffering, be our close companion, heal our wounds and our sickness, and give us comfort and strength.
We remember (name those known to you) who are ill and give thanks for the lives of those who have recently died.
We pray for all who mourn, and all who tend and care.
Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Christ our King,
we give thanks for the startling imagery of your kingdom;
for all that grows from tiny seeds, for sheep and coins,
lost and found, for salt and light and yeast.
We give thanks that your Kingdom grows in humility and kindness,
in the work of peacemakers, in the hearts of those who struggle,
in places where people find welcome and hope.
Make us people of your kingdom:
may your kingdom come, on earth as in heaven.
Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**