

CHRIST THE KING

21/11/21

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

In our circle of uncertainty and hurry,

you, O God, are the fixed point of calm.

In our stretched moments of stress and emotion,

you, O God, are the secure center of peace.

In our well-worn routine of the everyday,

you, O God, are the flash of fresh inspiration.

In our moments of the ordinary and the earthly,

you, O God, are the Spirit that transforms and transcends with the Holy.

Opening Prayer Christ: reign of Christ

Loving God, enable us to prepare for the reign of Christ.

When the reign of Christ begins, all will be free to worship and to express their opinions.

When the reign of Christ begins,

weapons of war will be destroyed and all children will be secure.

When the reign of Christ begins,

Mother Earth will be respected and her waters will be pure.

When the reign of Christ begins,

prayer and praise will flow spontaneously to God and worship will be wholehearted and joyful.

But when will the reign of Christ begin?

We will bring it closer! Amen.

HYMN 228 Crown Him with many crowns

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh_ept-Js

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of grace and peace,

you long to fill our lives with grace and our world with peace.

Your love for all that you have made is steadfast and unwavering.

Just as we are aware of only a tiny part of the sun's spectrum of energy,
so we are aware of only the smallest part of your sustaining love for the
whole cosmos.

Regardless of how little we experience and understand,

you pour love, grace and peace on us and in us at every moment of our
lives.

We open ourselves to your energy and we give you thanks in this and
every moment of our day.

God of presence, the Book of Revelation tells us that every eye will see
you.

We know that you are present in the world now in us and all that you have
made.

We confess to you that so often we are blind to your presence.

We know it in our heads but often we do not experience you in our souls
and spirits.

We can go through days and weeks and years without seeing you in our
lives,

forgetting that you are present.

Sometimes our blindness is willful.

We choose not to be open to your love and grace,

preferring the darkness of our own minds.

And yet you wait patiently for us to discover and rediscover you

within us, amongst us, everywhere, in even the smallest moments of our lives.

Forgive us for forgetting. Forgive us for closing our eyes.

Forgive us. We pray.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God does not forget.

God does not forget God's promise

of infinite forgiveness.

Today, in this very moment,

we all stand forgiven,

we all stand with open eyes

to see the forgiveness

and grace and love of God.

READINGS

- **Revelation 1:4b-8**

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds;

every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him;

and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

- **John 18:33-37**

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”³⁵ Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”³⁷ Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

HYMN 207 Jesus shall reign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE4DDB5whyk>

SERMON

Today is my first day back preaching in front of a live congregation here in the church since August. Ironically it is also the last Sunday of the Christian year. Next week is the start of Advent, which means that Christmas is just around the corner! Like everyone else I have to say: Where did the last year go?

Being the last Sunday of the year we look at the image of Christ as King. However for me it is more about exploring our images of Christ and the impact He has on our world. Christ is more than a political or titular head of some organisation. I hope that this morning we can take some time to tie together some of the understandings of Christ’s messages that we have explored in our readings during the past year.

The history of today's naming of it being 'Christ the King Sunday' goes back to a political move just after WWII. In 1922 Pope Pius XI created the day on the last day of the lectionary year as he was negotiating with Mussolini to secure the independence of the Vatican. In this deal the autocratic Pope agreed to suppress the only democratic party left in Italy in return for the continuation of the special status that the Vatican held. Pius had little time for democracy. His preference was to deal only with monarchies and other authoritarian regimes so that he could have treaties which favoured the Roman church. It is worth remembering that both Mussolini and Hitler granted favours to those mainline churches which followed their rules and did not criticise the dictators' dangerous attack on their own citizens.

This now leaves us with an anomaly in historical and liturgical terms, so why does it still come up in the Christian calendar. The ironic absurdity is that it has allowed us to explore how we look at Christ's position in the world in ways that were not clearly part of the traditions associated with the lectionary previously.

In the passage from John's Gospel we are taken to part of the trial of Christ when he was dragged before Pilate by the Temple Priests. Let me repeat the words we heard in the reading: "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

I think that it is worthwhile reflecting here about what we really mean when we pray using the words 'Your Kingdom come,' and again at the end of the Lord's Prayer when we say: "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever."

Let me be clear here that while we are not entering into a political debate in any way. We are at the same time acknowledging that when we use the words: 'Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,' we are clearly saying that things here on earth are far from perfect. Just think back to the last couple of weeks as the issue of climate change and stopping pollution have raged across the globe. A lot has been said but I doubt that any concrete solutions have been finalised.

Discussions on things like global warming are in many ways political as the solutions are not the simple preserve of a few well-meaning people. What we need to be reflecting on is that no matter what the type and approach of any sort of regime we are in fact seeking to get those systems to eventually move aside to allow God to rule in grace and harmony.

Now let us come back to the situation that Jesus was in. Under the controlling power of Rome it was a standard principle that no one could profess to follow any movement where they looked to any deity or power greater than Rome. Those who crossed this line were promptly stomped out. Treaties with subject states all acknowledged Rome's dominance. Hence the question from Pilate on that fateful night.

If Jesus had claimed an earthly kingdom he would immediately have been treated as an enemy of the state. However the conversation soon moves to a discussion on what is true authority and true kingship.

Pilate starts with: 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

Jesus responds to this by turning the question around saying: 'Do you ask this on your own, or has someone tried to influence your thoughts?' This is a real challenge to Pilate to suggest that he would be unable to figure the situation out for himself. Jesus is suggesting that Pilate is no more than a pawn in the hands of someone else in Jerusalem, like the Temple priests.

Here Pilate responds pointing out that he is not a Jew and has his own sources for information. He then asks Jesus what He has done to so offend the temple priests so as to make them hand Jesus over to him.

Here John's Gospel utilises a 'loaded' phrase, "the Jews." John uses this term to refer to those who fiercely held on to the existing religious and political systems and ignored Jesus' message. This meant that they were also resistant to what God was saying to them. Claims of love and grace would have challenged those selfish agendas.

Consequently when Pilate said: "I am not a Jew, am I?", this question is left hanging as a statement in itself. It says to John's audience that his allegiance to Rome did not necessarily make him resistant to Jesus' teachings. Here is where Jesus words come into focus. "My kingship is not from this world," replies Jesus. "If it were, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingship is not from here."

It is not as if Rome was opposed to people who were recognised as kings, after all Herod was a king but he was compliant to Roman domination and rule. For Pilate the only issue was whether Jesus was of any threat to Rome. In this situation the answers might have appeared evasive but each of them were talking on different issue.

Jesus is trying to say: "It is you that is trying to put the 'king' label on me. My job is to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And, with that statement, the gauntlet is thrown down fair and square to Rome and every government since. "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice, not yours, not Rome's, not Macquarie Street's, not Canberra's, not even the Pentagon's."

While we might think that Jesus is rejecting the word 'king' he is at the same time asserting His position. This then raises a metaphor. That is where we consciously use one word to bring out a hidden truth. Jesus is more than just a 'King'. We probably can agree that 'King' is not the correct word for Jesus, as in reading the Gospels we see that he constantly left the scene whenever the crowds started to contemplate the idea of making Him a king.

Jesus is not interested with all the trappings of being a monarch. He has no need of vast and lavish palaces and an attending staff of servants and courtiers. There is no need for human laws or even a military force. In the end the political idea of a 'king' does not give us a clear insight into our understanding of Jesus.

When we say the 'Jesus is King' we are seeking to explore a far more profound truth. There is in fact no earthly king or queen like Jesus. These are earthbound human terms. We are not the submissive subjects of some domineering set of subjugating laws. What we are seeking to understand is that Jesus' message of love and grace is the law that we need to seek out and follow.

We are not part of any attempt to undermine the political system of any other country, let alone our own nation. Equally we are not willing to compromise our values of love and justice and gracious hospitality just to comply with their political agendas. Our allegiance is only on the King of Love who is not caught up in human nationalism and boundaries.

Despite popular thinking the advent of the more democratic political systems which replaced the old monarchies has not really resolved the age old problem of the tension between human politics and God's Kingdom. Democracies can be just as blood thirsty as they try to expand their boundaries and in subjugating parts of God's creation. They may think that by broadening their power base that they are doing a better job but they can be just as abusive in the process of dominating and subjugating people.

We have an allegiance to the Word made flesh in Jesus. Jesus went to the cross as He would not sell out to the demands of earthly powers. In doing so He liberated us. Jesus accepted humiliation and the cross as God does

not compromise with earthly based power and domination. Jesus is the suffering servant who continues to expose the lies of the abusive regimes of the world, including many who we might otherwise think of as acceptable.

We are members of a special community which has no barriers based on race or nationality or gender, let alone wealth or social standing. We do know that we are called to be careful stewards of the wonderful natural resources that God provided for us. We are able to resist the outlandish claims of the power-mongers in this world. God has the only legitimate power.

Christ is a King in that He came to show us what God has done for us and to bring us the grace to be part of the one true community, Christians. This monarchy does not require an army or endless laws. We are able to end the fear with the knowledge that God loves and cares for all of us, no matter what!

HYMN 315 Mine eyes have seen the glory

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maty13s_db4

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of truth and faith,

you make us people of faith

and you call us to live in truth.

May all that we have and all that we are

be dedicated to faithful and truthful living.

May this money that came to us as a gift from you

be used as a gift in your service.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God, on this Sunday when we remember that living under the reign of Christ means to live in a truly gentle and loving way, we pray that people who only know a life of destruction and hate might be freed from their bondage that separates them from you. We pray for people who live in

war-torn countries that in place of violence there may be reconciliation. And there are so many people who live in our own country whose homes are a place of domestic violence - where this is so, we pray that adults and children might learn to respect one another, and so live with safety and security and be at peace.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, on this Sunday when we remember that living under the reign of Christ means to strive for justice and peace in the world, we pray that leaders of nations will serve the common good, and that they will be responsible with their authority that comes with leadership. We pray for cooperation across political and racial divides, that leaders will allow time to listen to one another's points of view so that difficult issues may be negotiated. We pray too, that they will be honest in what is said so that trust can be achieved.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, on this Sunday when we remember that living under the reign of Christ means to have compassion for one another, we pray that vaccines and other resources used to combat the Covid pandemic might be fairly distributed across the globe. We pray that remote communities in our own country will be adequately serviced. Also we pray that as world leaders continue to negotiate the issues of climate change that particularly the voices of those peoples who are most vulnerable will be heard and action taken.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, on this Sunday when we remember that living under the reign of Christ means believing that Jesus came to bring in God's kingdom, we pray that we who belong to this community of faith may be filled with your Holy Spirit so that our love for one another reflects your love for us. We give thanks that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. May we who confess your name proclaim the Good News of his coming among us, by giving of ourselves in service, word and sacrament.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, at all times we give thanks to you because you are the One who brings mercy and comfort to us all. We pray for those we know personally who are not well, or who are struggling with issues of old age, or are sad, or feel troubled in some way. We pray for those of our community who have particularly asked our prayers..... Give to those

who care for them wisdom, patience and gentleness and, to us all, your peace.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 147 To God be the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CeBoSQsBR0>

BENEDICTION

Grace to you and peace from God,
who is and who was and who is to come.

Go gently into this day.

Go into the great world of God in joy.

Grace to you and peace from God,
who is and who was and who is to come.

Go in the name of God.

Go in the way of Christ.

Go in the power of the Spirit

Grace to you and peace from God,

who is and who was and who is to come.

Shalom to you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzDdN-5gmuU>