

CHRIST THE KING
26/11/23
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 settled feeling of peace.
In our well-worn routine of the everyday,
you, O God, are the flash of fresh inspiration.
In our ordinary and earthbound moments,
you, O God, are the Spirit that transforms through the holy.

A Prayer for the Reign of Christ

Come, O Risen Christ, and reign among us!
Our worship will be joyful, insightful, and free.
Come, O Risen Christ, and reign among us!
Our faith community will be enthusiastic, supportive, and ready to serve.
Come, O Risen Christ, and reign among us!
The downhearted will know hope, and the suffering, peace.
Come, O Risen Christ, and reign among us!
The faiths of the world will join hands, and fear will come to an end. Amen.

HYMN 215 You servants of God

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptLLr_WjCz8

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

We worship you, O God, with joyful noise - with words of praise and adoration spoken and sung in the name of Jesus who brought your love song to us in person. In harmony with you, he puts new words in our mouths and new intentions in our hearts, especially a new understanding of power. Power shaped by love and righteousness, justice and mercy. We now know that power is not to be used to exploit or dominate, but to serve others as willingly as Jesus did. His life and death demonstrated how the love of power could be transformed by the power of love. We gather here today to celebrate your rule of love in our hearts as we experience it in Jesus and through the enabling gift of your Spirit. This we pray in the name of Jesus, our Servant King.

Jesus, show us your way.

We have been frustrated and irritated,
and not shown your patience.
We have been disbelieving of some and disregarding of others
and realise that we have burdened them with hurtful judgement.
Our generosity has come with expectations,
and our forgiveness has not always been unconditional.
Place your yoke across our life
so that we may find balance as we carry what is required.
Guide us and teach us, as we need to learn from you.
Speak into our hearts the word of life
so that we live in your way of love. Amen

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Please change the Words of Assurance section to the following:

When we listen carefully and deeply we find that God goes before us and knows our needs. We know from the scriptures that “there is one mediator between God and human kind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all”. (1 Timothy 2:5,6a).

This undeserved good news is that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

And so we say together:

Thanks be to God. Amen

READINGS

- **Ephesians 1:15–23**

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

- **Matthew 25:31–46**

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.”

HYMN 256 From heaven you came

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-lxT-2_jRg

SERMON

When she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, Mother Teresa asked that the prize money be donated to the poor people of Calcutta. She went on to say: “At the end of life we will not be judged on how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many good things we have done. We will be judged by *I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless and you took me in.*” And then she said, “Hungry not only for bread - but hungry for love; naked not only of clothing - but naked of human dignity and respect; homeless not only for a room of bricks, but homeless because of rejection. This is Christ in distressing disguise.”

Today we are remembering Jesus as King. What sort of King was he? Does what Mother Teresa said, have something to do with today's remembrance? In the gospel passage this morning we hear Jesus completely turning the concept of kingship upside down. In fact, he redefines everything we know about it, to the point that it is nearly unrecognisable. So what is it, that is said here in the scriptures on Christ the King Sunday, about relating to Jesus and one another? This is what I'd like to explore with you this morning.

Firstly, here is just a bit of background information to keep in mind. During his life on earth, Jesus flatly refused to have the title of king attributed to himself. However, he is referred to as king both at the beginning of his life on earth, and at the end. You will recall the wise men asking Herod, "Where is the king of the Jews?" And then thirty-three years later, that same title, King of the Jews, is written and nailed to the top of the cross, where that same child, now a grown man, hung between two thieves.

And another matter to keep in mind is that this passage today, and others we have been hearing over the last couple of weeks, are being spoken by Jesus to the disciples privately - that's recorded at the beginning of Matthew chapter 24. And from a verse in Mark 13, we know who those disciples were: Peter, James, John and Andrew. Why is that important to keep in mind? Because this teaching is addressed in the first instance to people who have already put their faith and trust in Jesus as the Messiah, or Christ. And that keeps us from any over-interpretation of today's gospel passage that might say that only doing good deeds is necessary for salvation. And just keep in mind that Matthew writes his gospel about 80AD for Christians in the early church so that they may receive Jesus' instruction - just like us today.

And one other matter to take on board: don't go getting too hung up about sheep and goats. It is just a small parable of two verses - a small part of the passage we've just heard. But in case you're interested, this is what I've read about sheep and goats: "In Palestine, from way back, sheep and goats have been kept together, and the shepherd cares for both. The people made clothes from sheep's wool and ate the meat; from the goats they drank the milk; they made clothes from goat skins and also bottles in which to carry wine and water. Both animals were very important and were well looked after, and they were only separated in the evening because sheep preferred the open air at night, whereas goats needed the warmth of shelter." So, the picture we have in this

passage from Matthew is then, a picture of a shepherd - who is God - loving both sheep and goats, and caring for them both. That they are separated in the parable is to create a picture of consequence - that everyone is loved by God, but we ourselves, like sheep and goats, all have choices to go this way or that way - to live out our Lord's way of love - or not.

So those then are three things that I'd like you to keep in mind: Jesus was referred to as king, but not by himself and in any case he turned the idea upside down. That this passage, and those of the past couple of Sundays from Matthew chapters 24 and 25, are parables Jesus spoke privately to a few disciples who already had their faith in Jesus Lord. And thirdly, don't get too hung up about God literally loving only sheep and not goats! [On Wednesday at the Craft 'n Chat group, I told the women a lovely story about a Cracked Pot - God even loves and uses us even though we might believe we are cracked!]

So where to now? On our journey of life we ourselves are living during the time between our Lord's ascension and his coming again. Those four disciples had asked Jesus when would he come again, and what will be the sign of his coming at the end of the age. The teaching in these two chapters of Matthew, is our Lord's reply to that question. Over the last couple of Sundays we have looked at his reply and also thought about it in relation to Paul's coming to grips with it and his sharing of his understanding to the early Christians at Thessalonica. Our Lord's teaching was 2000 years ago, as was Paul's explanation to that early faith community. I've mentioned before that the early Christians believed that Christ's return was imminent. Paul helped people not get too hung up about that, but rather helped them understand that security of their salvation was the foundational issue. And I suggested last Sunday, that that's where our focus needs to lie also.

So, how does our Lord reply to Peter, James, John and Andrew? He replies telling a series of parables. Two we're looked at: the bridesmaids who didn't get their act together and so missed out on the wedding banquet; and last Sunday, the slave who wasn't prepared to take a risk for his master even though he'd been given so much - he had misunderstood his Master's generosity - God's largesse! Those parables, like the one today, were told to disciples who already professed belief in Jesus as Lord, as the Messiah. So the purpose of this teaching about the time between our Lord's ascension and his coming again, is about a call to action in our daily lives now - right now.

They are about choices we ourselves make. In today's parable we are being asked whether we are going to be allowed into the kingdom - we are being asked will we choose the way of love and turning those thoughts, ideas, words, into action - or will we choose that's all too hard and costly so let's just forget it and live for ourselves - for our own advantage?

Notice in the passage today, Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." And then are listed six deeds of mercy: 1) to give food to the hungry; 2) to give drink to the thirsty; 3) to welcome the stranger; 4) to clothe the naked; 5) to tend the needs of the sick; and 6) to visit those in prison. It was these six acts that were to become the communal and social responsibility incumbent on every Christian, and then around the 13th century, a seventh obligatory was added to the list: 7) to bury the dead.

Martin Luther, the great theologian of the Reformation, back in the 1500's said that we should see these deeds performed, not because we fear judgement or wish to gain merit, but simply we should see them as the logical and natural outgrowth of the imitation of Christ. We could describe it today as our transformation if you like, or as sanctification.

It might seem quite overwhelming for any one of us as individuals to perform all of these six deeds, or seven if you add the last one. We are of the older aged variety - but even young ones can feel overwhelmed. I had a young volunteer builder come to help me in PNG one year, and his favourite phrase I gathered fairly early on, was, "I am overwhelmed!". But he ended up being my best helper! In any case, if all this does overwhelm you, then take on board what St Basil, a great father of the church way back in the 4th century reckoned. He argued that these commandments can only be fulfilled in community - individually, he said, to do them all, would be too much of a burden for us. How true!

Certainly, working together with his Holy Spirit living in us, we can make a difference in people's lives wherever they are and whoever they may be. Yet community works only if each individual share a personal commitment to the communal task. Today's scripture asks us to consider very seriously our commitment to the transformation of our lives individually, but I think we could also include all of us together. Are we all of us, wholeheartedly, about entering the kingdom? About acknowledging the sovereignty of Christ over our lives?

I'd like to take you back to the words of Mother Teresa. She talked about people being hungry for love; naked of human dignity and respect; homeless because of rejection. And she said, "This is Christ in distressing disguise." So what does this look like in our own community? People are hungry for what? What is it that they don't have? What are peoples' needs here? Don't we want them to know the love of Jesus, that they are loved by God and can be secure in his love? The critical verse in our passage is this: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." So I ask you, what is the "it"? Jesus is talking about his love, being turned into action - our loving him by loving others in practice.

So, what is the "distressing disguise" that Jesus wears that you see as you go about your ordinary daily lives? It might be a person suffering anxiety due to ill-health or an operation coming closer; it might be depression due to any number of causes; it might be a predicament that a person doesn't know how to deal with - all those I for one have come across just in this past week. - and more. You know what I am talking about because you are finding it too, I'm sure, as you rub shoulders with family, friends, neighbours. The point is, do we see these encounters, these folk, as "Jesus in distressing disguise?" Are we relating to them as we would to Jesus - as someone who needs time, care, being listened to, being respected - or are we just fobbing them off as an irritation or an interruption - in other words, neglecting Jesus? That is the choice that we have, and which the parable today is highlighting.

There is another way I see Jesus in "distressing disguise" in our community and medical research tells us that it has a big impact on our personal health - and that is the fact of loneliness. And isn't our Craft 'n Chat group on Wednesday mornings providing a place of acceptance and love for those who long for some company? Many of the women who come would otherwise just be at home by themselves, while some might be feeling the need for a break from a caring role at home. Right here, those of us from our own community of faith, are creating a place where those women can feel free to be themselves, come and go as they wish, feel at home. There I believe, in action, we are relating to one another in the way that Jesus models for us.

Truly, for all of us, there are opportunities every day of our lives to love people as Jesus, if only we have ears to hear, eyes to see.

Let me just add a few words about the passage we heard read from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This community of faith had a reputation. A good, in fact an excellent reputation! They had a reputation for having faith in the Lord Jesus and demonstrating that faith in love. They were a community that believed Jesus had risen and they were experiencing God's power in their lives. This is a community which had been transformed. They were a people of hope. Paul says to them, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers." Surely we too, would want to be on the receiving end of such great words of encouragement!

Today we say goodbye to this year in the church calendar. Next Sunday we move to Advent and the Gospel of Mark. Today therefore, is a bit like a New Year's Eve, so it's a very good day to renew our personal commitment, and our communal commitment, to be grounded and centred in our faith in Jesus. Let's be open, as Paul expresses it, to the "immeasurable greatness of God's power to believe." The largess of his generous love! And by accepting Jesus as Lord, Saviour, and King of our lives, may he draw us ever deeper into understanding his unique sacrificial way of living - of loving.

Amen

HYMN 246 Christ is the world's light

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne5MOMp6W_Y

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

O God, we pray that these gifts may be used wisely so that our church life reflects your way. May we be bringers of compassion and offer kindness and love to those who need a friend. May our money meet those in need to bring hope, healing and peace. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Before our prayers, I want to share with you a reflection which has been written by the President of the Uniting Church in Australia, the Rev. Sharon Hollis. I'd like you to sit comfortably, close your eyes, and listen prayerfully. She says.....

"Despair is easy at the moment. Fire ravishes our country. Climate change is impacting low lying lands across the globe. Droughts are becoming more severe in many places leading to famine. War rages in places noticed by the news and in places unnoticed except by those who

live through it. Sudan, Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ukraine and Palestine and Israel.

Daily we watch hospitals bombed, hostages held, babies dying for lack of basic care and homes crumbling.

Across the globe, conflict is causing division and preventing us from seeing the humanity in each other.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he speaks of God's wisdom being foolish to the wisdom of the world. God's wisdom is made known to us in the cross of Christ, in the willingness of Jesus to suffer death to bear all that breaks the world, to carry the injustice of the world, to overcome all that separates us from God and each other.

God's wisdom is the wisdom of suffering solidarity, joining the life of Christ with all the victims of war, with broken humanity, with the scarred earth.

God's wisdom is a love that endures alongside all who need hope, healing, peace and justice.

God's wisdom is wiser than despair, because it is not overcome by despair. It works in the world, not by turning from places of despair, but rather by suffering for and with those most in need, inviting us to pray, hope and work for a world renewed.

Rev Sharon closes her reflection saying to us, "In this time of deep despair, may you know God's strange wisdom which is renewing the world we love."

And now to our prayers. I am going to lead you with prayers from the World Council of Churches. These prayers fit well the Reign of Christ, and with Mother Teresa's phrase, "Christ in distressing disguise". Each time I say the words "For them", your response is, "May Your Kingdom Come". Let us pray,

Holy One, may your Realm of Love come for
the insignificant, unremarkable, over-looked people of the world;
for the un-noticed and simply ordinary people;
back-water sort of people who will never make much impact.
For them
May Your Kingdom Come.

Holy One, may your Realm of Love come for
those who are lost; those who have disappeared or are missing;
for the up-rooted, exiled and enslaved;
lost rights sort of people who will seldom be seen or heard.
For them
May Your Kingdom Come.

Holy One, may your Realm of Love come for
the fearful, the terrorised and the abused people of the world;
those who are unjustly imprisoned or entrapped;
voiceless people who will hardly dare to seek help.
For them
May Your Kingdom Come.

Holy One, may your Realm of Love come for
the subjugated, silenced and subdued people of the world;
for the lonely the lacking, the faded, the frightened;
shadowy people unable to bring attention to their suffering.
For them
May Your Kingdom Come.

Holy One, may your Realm of Love come for
all persons with disabilities;
for the redundant and poorly educated; the timid and un-appreciated;
struggling people who have to strive for support and respect.
For them
May Your Kingdom Come

In the dynamic of your Love, may your Realm become a reality for them
all. Amen

Before we sing the Lord's Prayer we will have a time of silence for us all
to bring before God those you know personally who particularly need
prayer just now.....

Loving God, we bring these prayers to you, trusting in your wise and
loving care. We come, longing for peace in the world, in our nation, in
our homes, and within ourselves; longing for the peace that only you can
give. We ask this in Jesus' name, who taught us to pray.....

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 216 Rejoice the Lord is King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhEUCSzaU8M&t=2s>

BENEDICTION

Go out into our community choosing to love God and one another.
May Jesus be your guide, your wisdom, your strength, your companion.
By the Holy Spirit, let your life be transformed to the pattern of your
Servant King.
And the blessing of God, Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**