



# WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



*THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST*

## 22<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER 2020

## CHRIST THE KING

<b><u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u></b>	<b>PARISH OFFICE:</b> Closed during lockdown TEL:01252 331161: e- mail: <a href="mailto:office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk">office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a> <b>BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS &amp; BAPTISMS</b> – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 <b>WEBSITE:</b> <a href="http://www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk">www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a>
Ezekiel 34 v 11 – 16 & 20 - 24	
Ephesians 1 v 15 - end	
Matthew 25 v 31 - end	

### COLLECT FOR CHRIST THE KING

Eternal Father,  
 whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of  
 heaven that he might rule over all things  
 as Lord and King:  
 keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit  
 and in the bond of peace,  
 and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet;  
 who is alive and reigns with you,  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, now and for ever. Amen.



### LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS

At present the Government have told all places of worship to close. We will resume our Sunday and Wednesday services in church as soon as we are given permission to do so. In the meantime there will be a weekly service of Morning Prayer on the website which you can watch by following the link, or read yourself from the text, also on the website. We will continue to provide resources for daily Evening Prayer. The church can be opened for individual prayer – just contact Fr Keith on 01252 321517 to make a time. Our Prayer Chain is still open too. As before, Carol and I and others will be keeping in contact with as many people as possible, and I am sure that there will be lots of other contacts being made either by phone or on social media. God bless and keep safe! See you in early December we hope!

### READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – ADVENT 1

Isaiah 64 v 1 – 9; 1 Corinthians 1 v 3 – 9; Mark 13 v 24 - end

Congratulations and good wishes to everyone celebrating their birthday this week, especially: CERI HURCOMBE (27<sup>TH</sup>)

### PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY:

RICHARD STOKES; LIAM MURPHY; JULIE QUANTRILL;  
COLIN BARTLETT

**ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN** - If you would like prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 This is a confidential service.

**CARE AND SHARE** - If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. for the shelves outside church, please leave items on the doorstep of the Rectory.

It would be nice to have some Christmas treats to put out next month! Thank you.

**SHOEBOX UPDATE** - SO PROUD of St. Peter's efforts this year. Despite all the difficulties we have made up 42 boxes which will be taken to a collection point when possible. Thank you to everyone who donated gifts, boxes or cash, knitted hats and toys, wrote cards or wrapped boxes. Barbara Rose.

**MEMORIES OF JULIE QUANTRILL** – the family are putting together some memory boxes of Julie for Jamie and Ailsa. If you have any memories/photos of Julie and family please let Claire Boud have them or Fr Keith. e-mails or hard copies are both acceptable:

[keithbristow1956@outlook.com](mailto:keithbristow1956@outlook.com) [clairehboud@gmail.com](mailto:clairehboud@gmail.com)

### ST PETER'S CHURCH CALENDARS

Ideal Christmas presents, our calendar for 2021 has pictures of St Peter's and room for appointments. Only £5 they will be available in December when we're back in church – or order before from Fr Keith – 321517.

### FROM A CHURCH BULLETIN

The sermon this morning: Jesus Walks on the Water.  
The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus.'

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

## ADVENT COURSE STARTS THIS THURSDAY

This year we will be meeting online, but there will be hard copies of the sessions available for those unable to access the internet to use for themselves at home. It's all FREE!

The course is entitled 'Hope' and is by John Birch – a theme which seems particularly relevant this year! There are four Bible Studies and discussions: The nature of hope; Listen to the witnesses; Hope in the Gospel promises; Hope for the future. The dates for the sessions online are Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> and Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November, Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December all at 7 – 30 pm.

If you wish to sign up for online, or receive a printed copy of the course, please phone Fr Keith on 01252 321517 or Carol on 01252 313239 or e-mail them at: keithbristow1956@outlook.com

carol.monk159@btinternet.com

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE ADVENT COURSE

### HOPE by JOHN BIRCH

Our definition of 'hope' will depend on our situation, and whether we are in a stable place emotionally or facing difficulties and anguish. At its simplest, hope can be the wish for something we desire to happen, and as diverse as hoping to see a long-lost friend later in the year, hoping the next bus will arrive on time, a dear friend who is ill will recover, the country votes for our choice of government, or that the police catch the thief who recently broke into our car. It can relate to the small world we inhabit as individuals or reach out to touch all people.

For those of us who call ourselves Christians, hope takes on a different dimension. It is still about our day-to-day existence and seeing hope within it, but it is also about a future hope for 'salvation', 'resurrection', 'eternal life' and how these strands intertwine and influence our relationship with God and the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 was a few months old when I wrote this study, and we were emerging from an initial fear of the unknown into a period of increasing knowledge about this virus, those most vulnerable to its ferocity and how best to change our behaviour to minimise chances of infection for ourselves and others. It also brought out the best in so many people, offering their help to the vulnerable in local neighbourhoods. Into what was a period of mourning and fear for many, emerged a hope that there could be better times ahead.

Campaigners for a green revolution to combat changes to our climate hope that their influence, backed up by science, will ensure that we leave a healthier world for our grandchildren to grow up into. There are many 'hopes' that reach the news headlines, and far more that do not. They should cause us to question how our faith can speak into these situations and affect our response.

Defining Christian hope in a paragraph is not that easy, but I offer this as a starting point:

'Biblical and Christian hope does not mean living in the clouds, dreaming of a better life. It is not merely a projection of what we would like to be or do. It leads us to discover seeds of a 'new world' already present today, because of the identity of our God, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This hope is, in addition, a source of energy to live differently, not according to the values of a society based on the thirst for possession and competition.' ([https:// www.taize.fr/en\\_article343.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_article343.html))

'I've read the last page of the Bible. It's all going to turn out all right.' (Billy Graham)

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## Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday CHRIST THE KING

*The annual cycle of the Church's year ends with this Feast of Christ the King. The year that begins with the hope of the coming Messiah ends with the proclamation of his universal sovereignty. The ascension of Christ has revealed him to be Lord of earth and heaven, and final judgement is one of his proper kingly purposes. The Feast of Christ the King returns us to the Advent theme of judgement, with which the cycle once more begins.*

*If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.*

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

(L) Lift up your heads, O gates;  
be lifted up, you everlasting doors;

All: and the King of glory shall come in.

(L) 'Who is the King of glory?'

All: 'The Lord, strong and mighty,  
the Lord who is mighty in battle.'

(L) Lift up your heads, O gates;  
be lifted up, you everlasting doors;

All: and the King of glory shall come in.

(L) 'Who is this King of glory?'

All: 'The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.'

*This hymn is said or sung:*

Crown Him with many crowns,  
The Lamb upon His throne.  
Hark! How the heav'nly 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!

Crown Him the Virgin's son!  
The God incarnate born,  
Whose arm those crimson trophies won  
Which now His brow adorn!  
Fruit of the mystic Rose,  
As of that Rose the Stem;  
The root whence mercy ever flows,  
The Babe of Bethlehem!

Crown Him the Lord of love!  
Behold His hands and side,  
Those wounds, yet visible above,  
In beauty glorified:  
No angel in the sky  
Can fully bear that sight,  
But downward bends his burning eye  
At mysteries so bright!

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 piercèd feet  
Fair flowers of paradise extend  
Their fragrance ever sweet.

Crown Him the Lord of years,  
The Potentate of time,  
Creator of the rolling spheres,  
Ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For Thou has died for me;  
Thy praise shall never, never fail  
Throughout eternity.

*(L)* The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

*All:* As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever. Amen.

*(L)* Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So, let us turn away from sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith:

*All:* O King enthroned on high,  
filling the earth with your glory:  
holy is your name,  
Lord God almighty.  
In our sinfulness we cry to you  
to take our guilt away,  
and to cleanse our lips to speak your word,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*All now say 'The Te Deum':*

We praise you, O God,  
we acclaim you as the Lord;  
all creation worships you,  
the Father everlasting.  
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,  
the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
The glorious company of apostles praise you.  
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.  
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

Throughout the world the holy Church acclaim you:  
Father, of majesty unbounded,  
your true and only Son, worthy of all praise,  
the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

You, Christ, are the King of glory,  
the eternal Son of the Father.  
When you took our flesh to set us free  
you humbly chose the Virgin's womb.

You overcame the sting of death  
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.  
You are seated at God's right hand in glory.  
We believe that you will come and be our judge.  
Come then, Lord, and help your people,  
bought with the price of your own blood,  
and bring us with your saints  
to glory everlasting.

Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance.  
Govern and uphold them now and always.  
Day by day we bless you.  
We praise your name for ever.  
Keep us today, Lord, from all sin.  
Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.  
Lord, show us your love and mercy,  
for we have put our trust in you.  
In you, Lord, is our hope:  
let us never be put to shame.

*We now say the collect for Christ the King (see first page)*

*Read Ezekiel 34 v 11 – 16 & 20 – 24 followed by Psalm 95 v 1 – 7 concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Read Ephesians 1 v 15 - end*

*(L)* Alleluia, alleluia.  
Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven.

*All:* Alleluia.

*Now read Matthew 25 v 31 – end Here are some thoughts on today's readings from Fr Keith:*

It may not be the doing of good works alone, that gets you into heaven, but *not* doing them, according to today's Gospel, will certainly keep you out. As St Paul makes clear, faith is the 'key to the Kingdom', but, nonetheless, it is clear that Jesus is expecting our faith in Him to be backed up and expressed in practical ways. He picks out giving help to the naked, the sick and the prisoner to exemplify this, because, He says, in them we meet Him.

The title of this feast day – Christ the King - will conjure up different images to different people. To ardent supporters of the Royal Family (and followers of a certain popular TV series!) palaces and pageantry will probably be at the top of list. To those who call for the abolition of the monarchy, 'waste of taxpayer's money' might be their first thought when royalty is mentioned! So, then, it is important that we recognise the fact that calling Christ our King in this day and age is something that needs a certain amount of explanation, if it is not to be counter-productive to some.

In the Old Testament, Kingship is just one of several images of God. Creator is another, as is 'shepherd' – as our reading from Ezekiel this morning demonstrates. In the New

Testament the image of 'Father' is used by Jesus, and He Himself takes on the description of shepherd, alongside others like 'vine', 'door' and 'light'. St John uses the image of 'Word' for Jesus, at the beginning of his gospel.

Even though, King, then, can be a bit of a loaded term, it is one that we can't just disregard, and it *can* still be useful as a tool of evangelism. I've already mentioned the 'practical' nature of Christianity, and the fact that 'Christ the King' identifies himself with the marginalised should change our whole view of what 'Kingly power', indeed any 'power' is all about in God's eyes.

To most people, Kingship exemplifies the summit of wealth and prestige and the ability to impose your will on others without possibility of dissent. As a person of the Trinity, Jesus has power and authority that cannot be limited by anyone. And yet, as His earthly ministry shows, in spite of the fact that He *could* just impose his will, he chooses, rather, to *invite* us to participate in His Kingdom in a way that earthly kings of old would probably have considered the path of weakness.

Jesus' Kingship is not about control and oppression. It's not about the use of, or threat of, violence to maintain his position. It's not about the acquisition of wealth and possessions, nor the flaunting of luxury. No, Jesus' Kingship is about riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, a beast of burden. It's about being born in a stable not a palace, and having poor shepherds as the first to worship Him, not the wealthy rulers of the country. Jesus Kingship flies in the face of what the world expects, and sets out to change everyone's perspective about who and what is important in life. As we hear in Mary's song – the Magnificat – in God's Kingdom the lowly are exalted, and the rich are sent away empty. Those who are self-important and self-centred in this life, will find that they are not recognised as citizens of the world to come.

Christ our King wants us to work with Him in the cause of justice and peace. In Christ's Kingdom the poor, the sick and the outcast find their deserved place, and, His Kingdom begins, not in the future, when we die, but in the present. That means that we, who are members of Christ's body, the Church, are called to be partners with Jesus in ensuring that 'God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven' right now. We must follow Jesus' example, and be identified with and work for those who our earthly leaders are often guilty of neglecting and leaving out.

Next week we begin a new church year on Advent Sunday. Advent is the season for focussing on Jesus' second coming and on the future judgement – unpopular though that might be. Jesus' stark warning today, using the example of sheep and goats, is one that all of us need to take to heart. This year has been one when many of us have stepped up to the mark and reached out to those in need, both with Covid related work, and through the various charities we have continued to support. But we can never afford to let up. The 'King of Love' who is our shepherd and guide, continues to reach out to all who need him, and he expects us to carry on doing the same as citizens of Christ's Kingdom before that Judgement Day.

So this feast of Christ the King serves as a reminder of the fact that God's ways are often contrary to those of the world. His priorities are different from the 'received wisdom' of mere mortals. Jesus invites, he doesn't coerce. He works with us and in us, if we let Him, to help people live their in the most fulfilling way possible. He reaches out to all of us even when we turn away from Him, thinking we know best. Jesus gives Himself to us and for us, that we all may live.

As we look forward to a new church year, let's think again about our commitment to the work he wants us to do and the standards He has set for us. Let's pray for His help and strength to be good citizens of His Kingdom, where it is not what you get that marks you out, but how much you give to others – your time and talents and your love. Only then will we ever hear those words spoken to us at the end of time: 'Come, you that are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Amen.

*Now pause for your own reflections.*

*(L): We now affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:*

*All* I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

*We now say together:*

*All* You will guide us with your counsel, O God,  
and afterwards receive us with glory.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦  
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦  
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦  
to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦  
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦  
holy and righteous in his sight  
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the  
Most High, ♦  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the  
shadow of death, ♦  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

**All** Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

**All** You will guide us with your counsel, O God,  
and afterwards receive us with glory.

*Now we turn to God in a time of prayer, adapted from  
Common Worship by Revd. Carol:*

Let us with confidence present our prayers and  
supplications the throne of grace.

We pray for all those in positions of power,  
That they may govern with wisdom and integrity,  
Serving the needs of their people.

May your reign come; Lord, hear our prayer

We pray for the Church, the sign of your reign,  
That it may extend your welcome to people of every  
Race and background.

May your kingdom come; Lord, hear our prayer

We pray for Christians of every denomination.  
That together we may come to understand  
the royal priesthood you bestowed on us in baptism.

May your dominion come; Lord, hear our prayer

We pray for those whose commitment to truth  
brings them into conflict with earthly powers,  
That they may have the courage to endure.

May your rule come; Lord, hear our prayer

We pray for the community of faith,  
That attentive to your word  
we always worship in spirit and in truth

May your reign come; Lord, hear our prayer

We pray for those working towards a better life for all  
in the Covid19 pandemic, especially those who work  
in research and development,  
for vaccines and other treatments.

We pray for the medical profession who care for the sick,  
and we take a moment to remember those who are unwell,  
in our own community and families.

We pray for those who mourn,  
remembering RICHARD STOKES; LIAM MURPHY; JULIE  
QUANTRILL; COLIN BARTLETT who have died recently.  
May they know the joy of your Kingdom;

Lord, hear our prayer

Loving God,  
You have taught us that the power of the heart  
is greater than the power of wealth and might.  
Hear us as we pray for the fulfilment of your reign.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our King;  
to Him be glory and power for ever. Amen.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess him King of glory now;  
'tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

At his voice creation sprang at once to sight:  
all the angels' faces, all the hosts of light,  
thrones and dominations, stars upon their way,  
all the heavenly orders in their great array.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners, unto whom he came;  
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,  
brought it back victorious when from death he passed;

Bore it up triumphant, with its human light,  
through all ranks of creatures, to the central height,  
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast,  
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

All creation, name him, with love as strong as death;  
But with awe and wonder, and with bated breath.  
He is God the Saviour, he is Christ the Lord,  
Ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue  
all that is not holy, all that is not true.  
crown him as your captain in temptations' hour;  
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

Truly, this Lord Jesus shall return again,  
with his Father's glory with his angel train;  
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,  
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

*Let us pray:*

God the Father,  
help us to hear the call of Christ the King  
and to follow in his service,  
whose kingdom has no end;  
for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, one glory. Amen.

Stir up, O Lord,  
the wills of your faithful people;  
that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good  
works, may by you be plenteously rewarded;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(L)* May Christ, who has opened the kingdom of heaven,  
bring us to reign with him in glory. Amen.

*(L)* Let us bless the Lord.  
*All* Thanks be to God.

*All:* May the souls of the faithful departed, through the  
mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory.  
Amen.

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## Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,  
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.  
O Lord, make haste to help us.

*A lamp or candle may be lit.*

Restore us, Lord God of hosts.  
Turn the light of your face to us and save us.  
Will you not give us life again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?  
Show us your mercy, O Lord,  
and grant us your salvation.  
Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,  
we pray with one heart and mind:

*Silence is kept.*

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,  
so may your mercy come down upon us  
to cleanse our hearts  
and set us free to sing your praise  
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 80; Tue 101; Wed 122; Thurs 133;  
Fri 146; Sat 150 ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between  
the two readings we say:*

*All We have come before the throne of God  
to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

- 1 We have come before God's holy mountain, ♦  
to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.
- 2 We have come before countless angels making  
festival, ♦  
before the assembly of the firstborn citizens of  
heaven.
- 3 We have come before God, who is judge of all, ♦  
before the spirits of the just made perfect.
- 4 We have come before Jesus, ♦  
the mediator of the new covenant.
- 5 We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken: ♦  
so let us give thanks and offer to God acceptable  
worship,
- 6 Full of reverence and awe; ♦  
for our God is a consuming fire.

*All Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

*All We have come before the throne of God  
to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

*Readings:*

Monday      Isaiah 14 v 3 - 20; Matthew 9 v 18 - 34  
Tuesday     Isaiah 17; Matthew 9 v 35 to 10 v 15  
Wednesday: Isaiah 19; Matthew 10 v 16 - 33  
Thursday:    Isaiah 21 v 1 - 12; Matthew 10 v 34 to 11 v 1  
Friday:      Isaiah 22 v 1 - 14; Matt. 11 v 2 - 19  
Saturday:    Isaiah 24; Matthew 11 v 20 - end

*Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)*

*All The righteous will shine like the sun  
in the kingdom of their Father.*

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit  
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on  
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the  
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his  
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation  
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered  
the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting  
up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the  
rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to  
remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and  
his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

*All The righteous will shine like the sun  
in the kingdom of their Father.*

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is  
ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world  
and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week:

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

Jesus shall reign where e'er the sun  
doth his successive journeys run;  
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

People and realms of every tongue  
dwell on his love with sweetest song;  
and infant voices shall proclaim  
their early blessings on his Name.

Blessings abound where e'er he reigns:  
the prisoner leaps to lose his chains,  
the weary find eternal rest,  
and all the humble poor are blest.

To him shall endless prayer be made,  
and praises throng to crown his head;  
his Name like sweet perfume shall rise  
with every morning sacrifice.

Let every creature rise and bring  
peculiar honours to our King;  
angels descend with songs again,  
and earth repeat the loud Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, at this time of crisis when so many are suffering, we pray for our nation and our world. Give our leaders wisdom, our Health Service strength, our people hope. Lead us through these parched and difficult days to the fresh springs of joy and comfort that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Loving Father God be with us in our distress: with our families, friends and neighbours, our country and our world. Give health to the sick, hope to the fearful, and comfort to the mourners. Give wisdom to our frontline and key workers, insight to our government and patience to us all; Overcome disease with the power of your new life, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### A Family Prayer

Loving God, you know us and all that we are facing. We thank you that we can come to you as we are – with all our fears and concerns, our difficulties and challenges. Please draw close to each of us and those we remember before you now. Bring to us your peace and comfort. And fill us with your Spirit that we may be bearers of your grace and hope to others. As a country protect us, encourage us and keep us. In the name of your Son Jesus we pray. Amen

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

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## SERMON FOR CHRIST THE KING FROM BISHOP JO

### POWER AND VULNERABILITY

Matthew 25 v 31 – 46

So, the Crown is back, series 4. The machinations of our monarchy. I wonder who among us has already watched the lot? But I tell you, there's no nation is more hooked on this series than the USA. So proud to have broken free from the trappings of a monarchy back in the revolutionary years of the 1770s, yet still intrigued, fascinated, even obsessed with it ever since.

You only have to watch Hamilton to see how the themes don't grow tired – overlaid as they are by the brilliant Jonathan Groff as King George III singing 'You'll be back'. If you don't know it, I give you full permission to pause this YouTube and watch it. It's my favourite song in that musical. And there are some pretty good parodies going around just now related to the contemporary exasperation with democracy.

The fascination and fear of empire has to do with the exercise of power, and that's where I want to pay attention today as we celebrate Christ the King. I want

to explore what Mt 25 reveals about Jesus's exercise of kingship. We're looking at the last chunk of a long section of Jesus teaching the disciples on the Mount of Olives, two chapters that began with the disciples asking about the end of the age. And here, at the end of the age, Jesus describes the Son of Man seated in glory, surrounded by angels attending him. His everlasting reign builds on the picture you find in the OT describing God's reign (for example, in Isaiah 6). That divine reign finds its echoes in the reign of the human kings - David and so on. It also picks up many other contemporary notions of royal grandeur from the ancient world, but still relevant even now.

Arrayed around this lofty throne are the countless loyal subjects paying homage, and we glimpse the One who wears the crown offering edicts and exercising judgement – separating the sheep from the goats, the worthy from the unworthy. Judgements which are final once issued, that is, with no scope for negotiation or appeal. The reference to the King's subjects as *sheep and goats* possibly reinforces that sense of power vs powerlessness. In that part of the world, certainly to an untrained eye, sheep and goats look remarkably similar to each other – which is to say, at least to the outsider, the exercise of judgement may *present* as rather random. Eeny meeny miney now. On the one hand here is recognised the ultimate power of this King – to judge as He wills, as He sees fit.

But, I suggest to you, that's as far as the classic stereotype of royal power goes here in Matthew 25. Yes, Jesus is king, absolutely and eternally; but it turns out he is utterly different from any king you've ever heard of before. Why? He *explains* his criteria for the separation of 'sheep' from 'goats': it's directly related to the way his subjects treat him when he is hungry, when he is thirsty, when he is excluded, when he is naked, when he is sick or when he is in prison. What? The king left hungry and thirsty, a king being othured and stripped, His Majesty in hospital or in prison? These things aren't relevant to someone who has the means of protection and the wherewithal for prosperity, don't be ridiculous. The king is in his royal palace, dining at a long table, robed in ermine! It doesn't make sense. He has all the larders and wardrobes in the world! His guards serve to defend his freedom not to enforce lockdown... it's just not possible.

Jesus dares us to imagine this king on the other side of the tramlines. He stretches us to imagine a figure who sets aside his throne for the sake of the poor. At the same time he challenges our distinction between the haves and have nots, between the powerful and the powerless, between the deserving and the undeserving – not least because the kind of king that Jesus is IS one who knows hunger, thirst, exclusion, exposure, sickness and imprisonment. We can read this literally in terms of what happens to him in Jerusalem that leads to crucifixion – each of those six conditions are part of the account. And we can read it

metaphorically, in the sense that Jesus so fully identifies with people in these six circumstances that he *is* there, he's always there, such is the extent to which he is Emmanuel, God-with-us. I'm reminded of Matt Redman's beautiful lyrics,

You laid aside your majesty, gave up everything for me,  
suffered at the hands of those you had created...

That is to say, the way Jesus exercises power is totally different to any king you've ever imagined before. From here on, this is what the exercise of power in Jesus name looks like. No lauding over; no looking down, rather a coming alongside, even a looking up. In God's kingdom, you will find the king with the least, the last, the lost. Let anyone who claims a position of authority, or anyone climbing a greasy pole beware. With Jesus, power and vulnerability sit close. (Note that a preacher preaches to herself first and foremost...)

And those who thought they knew better, those familiar with authority, those who were articulate and good at raising debate are depicting pushing back. *'But Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'* They don't get it. Whether they don't listen and can't hear or whether they can't or don't want to imagine Jesus is such a place of vulnerability I will leave to your imagination. But for sure in their defensiveness they've just increased the distance and the distinction between the haves and the have nots, the powerful and the powerless, by their very reaction. A move of course which, consciously or unconsciously, reinforces the power of the powerful and increases the vulnerability of the vulnerable. Here are people who seem more interested in talking about social dynamics than challenging them; more interested in reflecting on pastoral need than responding to it. More interested in winning an argument than rolling up their sleeves.

And so the King spells it out in words of one syllable, "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."

We have here not only a critique of power, and some advocacy for social action. There's also something important here about safeguarding the vulnerable. Yes, I mean safeguarding, in all the senses that IICSA has shown us just how much we have to learn and heed. Here we glimpse King Jesus exercising his power for the wellbeing of those most vulnerable. He knows his power, he owns his power, and he shares his power – with those most disempowered. We may not all be kings or bishops or teachers, we may feel power-less, yet whoever we are, we all have *some*

power – power that can be exercised for good or power that can wittingly or unwittingly cause harm. And here the gospel challenges us: how do we wield it? Does it serve the wellbeing of those most vulnerable? There's nothing more dangerous than the denial of our own power, yet it happens all the time, because each of us knows more keenly our sense of powerlessness in the areas where we're vulnerable. Of course we do. But the challenge is to use our power not for self-protection but for the protection of others. Are we ready, I wonder, to cultivate the habit of look beyond ourselves, and to listen and see and protect those who are truly most vulnerable. It happens in the most surprising places, even in the corridors of power?

Prompted by the Netflix portrayal in *The Crown*, I would point out that such vulnerability is found even in corridors of power. I'm thinking of Princess Diana – a complicated one for sure – yet who could have seen what we now suppose to be true prior to Andrew Morton's biography? Power and vulnerability are not as far removed as we may like to suppose. Someone who on the outside is dressed in finery designed by Bruce Oldfield ... on the inside is hungry and desperate, sick and feeling imprisoned. Jesus would urge us not to be surprised at who may be vulnerable. It may be hard to see, it may be well disguised, but do not too easily distinguish those with power from those who are vulnerable. They sit close. It is possible to have power yet to feel powerless. Indeed I think in fact it's very common, and dangerously so.

Jesus does not deny his power, nor does he forgo his power. Despite his power, he knows powerlessness, not least from harsh experience. And he chooses to exercise his power for the sake of the vulnerable. Never in self-interest, but for the benefit of others.

Meanwhile, at that time when Christ the King is found back on his throne, exercising his powers of judgement over sheep and the goats: don't be trapped into thinking for one moment you're powerless to affect that judgement. The very fact that this King is not yet back is a gift we are offered: the gift of time, opportunity, and empowerment: to seek out the face of Christ among those least likely to know Emmanuel, God-is-with-them. To impact their circumstances, and in turn to impact our own. Perhaps for ever.

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