

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:
Telephone Service for Sunday 21 November 2021 – The Feast of Christ the King

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett, and can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this service for the Bride Valley churches. Today we celebrate the kingship of Christ. A kingship of service using a bowl and towel; a life-giving kingship of healing and friendship. A king who is servant of all and friend of sinners.

Psalm 29: 2b

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

Hymn: When morning gilds the skies

1. When morning gilds the skies,
my heart awaking cries,
may Jesus Christ be praised:
Alike at work and prayer
to Jesus I repair;
may Jesus Christ be praised.

3. The night becomes as day,
when from the heart we say,
may Jesus Christ be praised:
The powers of darkness fear,
when this sweet chant they hear,
may Jesus Christ be praised.

2. Does sadness fill my mind?
A solace here I find,
may Jesus Christ be praised:
Or fades my earthly bliss?
My comfort still is this,
may Jesus Christ be praised.

4. Be this, while life is mine,
my canticle divine,
may Jesus Christ be praised:
Be this the eternal song
through ages all along,
may Jesus Christ be praised!

Invitation to Confession

We come together to receive the forgiveness of a new day.
We come together to rejoice in the freedom to begin again.
We come together to receive mercy from our heavenly Father.

Prayers of Penitence

Christ came in humility to share our lives: forgive our pride.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ came with good news for all people: forgive our silence.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Christ came in love to a world of suffering: forgive our self-centredness.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love bring *us* back to himself, forgive *us* our sins, and assure *us* of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Collect

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.

Revelation 1: 4 - 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, 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, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds;
and 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.

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

Gospel Reading

John 18: 33 - 37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 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?" 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." 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."

Reflection

Christ the King

Today is the last Sunday of the church's year – its so difficult to get my head around the fact that Advent starts next week! Where has this strange year gone?

Since the year 2000, this final Sunday of the year has been the time when we reflect on the kingship of Jesus Christ. What kind of king is he?

In our gospel reading for today, we join Jesus on the morning of Good Friday. The night before he had had supper with his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem. John recounts how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Then afterwards, they went out to the garden across the Kidron valley, which was a place often frequented by Jesus and his disciples. And it was here, in the garden, that soldiers from Pilate and the chief priests came to arrest him. We are told that Peter took out a sword and cut the ear off one of the high priest's men but that Jesus told Peter to put his weapon away – that way of violence was not to be the way for them.

And here we are now, in Pilate's headquarters, the Praetorium, which is right next to the Temple. Who is Pilate? He is the emperor's man in this outpost of the Roman Empire. He is the representative of the most powerful person in the known world. Pilate's job is to ensure that the local population remain subdued and 'loyal' to the emperor. The empire is run on enforcement. I wonder if you've seen the Monty Python film, *Life of Brian*. There is a comic scene in which local people in Judaea say to each other, 'What have the Romans ever done for us?' and then they come up with a string of benefits from Roman rule, including the roads. It is true that the Romans did build roads wherever they went, but we know they weren't for the benefit of the local populations - they were for the swift deployment of the troops, so trouble could be stamped out quickly. And Judaea was known for being trouble in the Empire.

So we have Pontius Pilate on the one hand, and Jesus on the other and basically, Pilate's big question is, 'Who are you?' Are you a trouble maker? Are you a traitor, claiming to be a king, the king of the Jews, in the Emperor's territory? Are you likely to cause unrest amongst the local population? Pilate has his frame of reference – either you are the oppressor or the oppressed – are you threatening to become the oppressor here?

Pilate is struggling to 'place' Jesus and it is not surprising. Basically, its because Jesus is coming from a place

where the system that Pilate operates for his master is upended and obsolete. In the empire system, everyone exists for the Emperor's benefit – all the movement is 'up' the chain of command. There is no expectation at all that the Emperor will look after those living in his lands – they are there to work and slave and most likely die for him! In the place Jesus is coming from, priorities are quite different: there is no domination, no oppression, but rather Jesus comes, armed with a bowl and towel to wash feet; riding on a donkey, not a war horse; weeping over a city that won't hear his message of good news for all. Healing of body and mind is a priority; and Christ's self-giving love is the ultimate action that demonstrates what God is about.

Whilst Christianity was a minority religion in a pagan empire, it was relatively straightforward to distinguish the different approaches of, on the one hand, an oppressive empire and on the other, Christ's kingdom of self-giving love and invitation to freedom – a message and way of life seized on by thousands of ordinary people throughout the Roman empire. It was when the emperor Constantine caused Christianity to become the religion of the empire, that was when things started to get more problematic, as the imperial religion was then required to endorse the system of empire. A faith characterised by service and sacrifice became inextricably linked to an oppressive system of domination.

This reminds me of the words attributed to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 'When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said "let us close our eyes and pray." When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land.'

It is obvious from the gospels that Jesus had no interest in gaining political power. He stayed mainly on the margins of society – Galilee was like an outpost of Judaea, not only geographically distant from Jerusalem but also an area where Jews and Gentiles mingled together – the boundaries were far less clear cut here. He ministered to those who would have been considered nobodies and gathered friends around him from a similar background. This is the king we are invited to celebrate today – a king of an upside-down kingdom, far removed from empire and domination, - a kingdom of justice and mercy, of compassion and care, of truth and life, in which no one is forgotten or worthless.

Amen.

Hymn: Jesus Christ is waiting

<p>1 Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets; no one is his neighbour, all alone he eats. Listen, Lord Jesus, I am lonely too. Make me, friend or stranger, fit to wait on you.</p>	<p>4 Jesus Christ is dancing, dancing in the streets, where each sign of hatred he, with love, defeats. Listen, Lord Jesus I should triumph too. Where good conquers evil let me dance with you.</p>
<p>2 Jesus Christ is raging, raging in the streets, where injustice spirals and real hope retreats. Listen, Lord Jesus I am angry too. In the Kingdom's causes let me rage with you.</p>	<p>5 Jesus Christ is calling, calling in the streets, 'Who will join my journey? I will guide their feet.' Listen, Lord Jesus, let my fears be few. Walk one step before me; I will follow you.</p>
<p>3 Jesus Christ is healing, healing in the streets; curing those who suffer, touching those he greets. Listen, Lord Jesus, I have pity too. Let my care be active, healing, just like you.</p>	

Prayers

We pray for all those in positions of authority, that they may govern with wisdom and integrity, serving the needs of their people.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray for the church, that it may extend your generous welcome to people of every background.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

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

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray for those struggling with illness, pain, or sorrow, that they may receive your healing, self-emptying love.

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

The Lord's Prayer

And 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 this day our daily bread,**

**And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen**

The Blessing

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with you and guide you on your way at every change and turn; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among *you* and remain with *you* always.

Amen.

Anthem: The Cherubic Hymn

See those winged angels,
softly they appear to us,
and the life bestowing Trinity
our thrice holy song do we raise to thee,
thus singing praises to thee
let us lay aside all our earthly cares.

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Invitation to Confession adapted from *Praying with the Earth: a prayerbook for peace*, John Philip Newell, Canterbury Press (2011).