



The Parish Church of St Augustine, Endcliffe

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Welcoming all, Following Jesus, Growing together



Private Prayer

Sunday 22 November 2020

Christ the King / Sunday next before Advent

Collect of the Day

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.

Readings

Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24

11 For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹²As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. [...] ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. [...] ²⁰ Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²² I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

Psalms 95.1-7

¹ O come, let us sing to the Lord; •

let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving •
and be glad in him with psalms.

³ For the Lord is a great God •
and a great king above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth •
and the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, •
and his hands have moulded the dry land.

⁶ Come, let us worship and bow down •
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

⁷ For he is our God; •
we are the people of his pasture and the sheep
of his hand.

Ephesians 1.15-end

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray 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, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,

¹⁹and 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, ²¹far 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. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25.31-end

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. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;
⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I 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." ³⁵for 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, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." ³⁷Then 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? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, "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."

⁴⁴Then 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?" ⁴⁵Then 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." ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Brief Reflections

Today we focus on Christ as King. Following from last Sunday's readings urging us to be prepared, today we continue with the moment when the Son of Man is on the throne surrounded by angels and dispensing justice. What is clear, however, is that Christ's judgement puzzles people; his 'scales' not what they expected. The judge, however does not explain himself; rather he expects an understanding of scripture, whereby 'I didn't know' is not accepted as a mitigating factor.

The reading from Ezekiel shows God looking for the lost sheep in order to care for the ones lost, the weak and the lean; whilst rejecting the fat sheep who selfishly kept the green pastures to themselves and deliberately "pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals ... scattered them far and wide" (Ezekiel 34:21). Christ's own audience could not feign ignorance of this Hebrew Bible text and indeed the nature of God exposed by it.

At times, we too manage to ignore what we know about God and his nature. We too may be tempted to think that it's OK to ignore the hungry, the thirsty, the estranged, the naked, sick and imprisoned ... because it's not our job – others will see to it; because there are systems in place to deal with these people and their needs; because it's all so ... messy.

That is why Paul's prayer to the Ephesians is that they might come to know Jesus Christ. This knowledge is not linked as religiosity, as some might interpret, but rather to the knowledge of the crucified Jesus, the human, suffering figure who – in a rather upside side down sort of way from where we're standing – is

also the King above all kings, to whom all creation is subject. When we acknowledge Christ as our King, and willingly become his body, we can have no illusions about what we are meant to be and to become.

And yet, we need to understand that this kind of kingship is different from other types of leadership. It is not selfish; it does not seek self-promotion and self-interest. By contract to this world's values, it is self-giving and self-sacrificing. Christ the King came as a servant; to die for us in order for us to have life. We his body, we his people, we his church, we his family ... get to inherit his kingdom. All the while, we need to act with love and kindness, often in very practical ways, and remember the 'least of these' who are members of Christ's **family**.

Let us pray with Paul, that the eyes of our heart are enlightened, so we may know what is the hope to which he has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints'.

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.