

FORTH VALLEY METHODIST CIRCUIT WEEKLY SERVICE SUNDAY 22ND NOVEMBER 2020 (CHRIST THE KING)



Opening sentences

Let us come before His presence with Thanksgiving
And show ourselves glad in Him with Psalms
For the Lord is a great God
And a great King above all gods. (Psalm 95:2-3)

Hymn 1: Come, now is the time to worship (StF 24)

Come, now is the time to worship,
come, now is the time to give your heart;
come, just as you are to worship,
come, just as you are before your God.
Come.

One day every tongue
will confess you are God,
one day every knee will bow.
Still, the greatest treasure remains
for those who gladly choose you now.

Come, now is the time to worship,
come, now is the time to give your heart;
come, just as you are to worship,
come, just as you are before your God.
Come.

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Prayer of Approach, Confession and Thanksgiving

Lord God, our Creator, Redeemer and Friend; we approach you now, not because we are great enough, but because You are gracious enough to receive everyone of us. We approach You now, not because of all we have, but because of all we need to receive from You. We approach you now, not from our own strength or importance, but because of all You are, all You can do, and because of the love You have for all of us.

Because we can approach You without fear, we come humbly before You and seek Your forgiveness for our sins. When we believe we are greater, more important, or better than others – we ask Your forgiveness; when we believe we don't need anything You can give us – we ask Your forgiveness; when we believe we can do all things through and by ourselves and fail to rely on Your strength and gracious love – we ask Your forgiveness.

Let's pause for a minute and ask God's forgiveness for our own sins – those things we alone have done and those we have left undone.

Gracious, loving, powerful God, because of who and all You are, You have forgiven our sins even before we ask. Through the sacrifice, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord – our sins have been forgiven.

We give thanks for the incredible gift of Your forgiveness. We thank You that in these turbulent, uncertain and dangerous times You are our strength in the midst of the turbulence; You are the one unchangeable truth in our uncertain lives; and that You are the peace, the security, the refuge and the safety in our dangerous times. Amen.

Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16

¹¹ “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and

the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Gospel: Matthew 25:34-40

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you from the founding 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 made me your guest, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you provided them, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ Then the people who have done what God wants will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and make you our guest, or needing clothes and provide them? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ The King will say to them, ‘Yes! I tell you that whenever you did these things for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did them for me!’

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Hymn 2: The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll not want (StF 481)

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.
And I will trust in You alone.

(Refrain)

And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.

(Descant)

I will trust, I will trust in You.

I will trust, I will trust in You.

Endless mercy follows me,
Goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

Refrain

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Refrain

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Reflection

This Sunday is designated for the celebration of Christ the King. It's the last Sunday in the Christian Church's calendar year. In a way, you could think of it as the Church's New Year's Eve. This Sunday we think of Jesus Christ as King of creation, King of heaven, our Shepherd King and King of our lives.

When I hear Ezekiel mentioned I usually think first of 'dry bones', it's perhaps the passage most known of all credited to this prophet. But here he's reporting the words of 'the Sovereign Lord'; the one Supreme Leader, Ruler, King. He records how this King is also a Shepherd, one who can see and know each one of His flock. He is a King who is compassionate and understands all His people have been through and are continuing to go through. He promises to return

them to their own land and heal all their wounds and strengthen the weak. He is truly a Shepherd King.

This is the King many of us desperately need right now. In these uncertain times of viral pandemic, political divisiveness, and when so many are facing the loss of their livelihoods; this is the time we need to trust even more that our Sovereign Lord, Shepherd King is there for us. He knows who is lost and needs to be brought back home; He knows who is wounded in body or heart; He knows what to provide for our healing, strengthening and renewal of purpose. He is the Lord of the 23rd Psalm – the one who watches over each of us and makes sure we are provided with all we truly require.

It's Jesus whom we think of most as Shepherd – the Good Shepherd, as he refers to himself in John's Gospel. And in the passage from Matthew's Gospel the Shepherd speaks as King. In Ezekiel the Sovereign Lord promised to shepherd the flock with justice. Here the King explains how he expects that justice to be seen in the land. He makes us realize that we are to be the demonstration of the King's justice through our actions. We are to use all the God-given power we have to act with that justice – in doing good for others, and demanding justice from and for all. We are not only expected to use our power for good, we are also to challenge all in power to be forces for justice in the world.

Jesus promises that the inheritance of those who act justly is the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a Kingdom where people are recognized for their dignity in serving others even – or especially – in hard times. It is a Kingdom in which it is natural to act justly towards all. A Kingdom in which every person is treated like a king, whether politician or health worker; whether powerful or powerless; whether foolish or wise. All are treated with justice when Jesus is King.

I mentioned at the beginning of this reflection that Christ the King Sunday could seem a bit like the Church's New Year's Eve. That's because next Sunday begins the Church's New Year – the First Sunday in Advent, the time to prepare for Christmas. Let's begin those preparations by remembering we celebrate the birth of The King of Justice, Truth and Love.

Prayers of Intercession

Sovereign Lord, we bring before you now in our words, thoughts and hearts those who we know to be in great need this day.

We bring those who are suffering in any way as they fight against the viral pandemic.

We pray for those whose livelihoods and homes are in jeopardy because of the economic situation brought about by the pandemic.

We pray for those whose movements and normal routines have been severely curtailed by the necessary restrictions.

We pray for those who are ill at home, in hospital and in intensive care.

We pray in gratitude for all the medical workers, hospital cleaners, paramedics, lab technicians, canteen workers and all who are united in giving care and support to those who are ill.

We pray for the leaders of this and every nation as they seek the best way forward to limit the spread of the virus, to protect the health of the people in their nations while also protecting the economic needs of the people.

We pray for those nations where protests over the restrictions to control the virus have escalated to violence; where racial injustice has brought unwarranted deaths; where those living in poverty are oppressed by those who are wealthy.

We pray for the people in the countries where elections are being held which can change the hopes and dreams of all for good or ill. We think of Myanmar and the United States of America as just two such nations.

Finally Sovereign Lord, we pray for those who have won, and those who have lost those elections. Each needs Your justice to be able to surrender anger, frustration and even hate over real and / or perceived injustice during those campaigns. Only then can they hope to have room in their hearts and nations for Your peace and justice for all.

As He asked us to do, we offer these and all our prayers in the name of our Shepherd-King, Jesus Christ who taught us to pray in these words:

The Lord's Prayer

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.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever, **Amen.**

Hymn 3: Jesus is King (StF 327)

Jesus is King and I will extol Him,
give Him the glory, and honour His name;
He reigns on high, enthroned in the heavens -
Word of the Father, exalted for us.

We have a hope that is steadfast and certain,
gone through the curtain and touching the throne;
we have a Priest who is there interceding,
pouring His grace on our lives day by day.

We come to Him, our Priest and Apostle,
clothed in His glory and bearing His name,
laying our lives with gladness before Him -
filled with His Spirit we worship the King:

'O Holy One, our hearts do adore You;
thrilled with Your goodness we give You our praise!
Angels in light with worship surround Him,
Jesus, our Saviour, for ever the same.

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Blessing

May the words of Christ our King, bring you, strength, peace and wisdom as you keep this worship in your hearts. Go in peace in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

With thanks to Rev Linda McMurray for preparing this week's order of service.