

**Call to Worship**

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: 'Obey your orders without fault or failure until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ which God will bring about in His own good time.'

**Hymn CH4 110 – Glory be to God the Father,**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Loving Father, Sovereign God, we come into your presence today to praise you for the great wonder at the heart of the Gospel – your sharing our humanity and enduring our weakness.

You are sovereign over all, yet you became our servant. You are the holy one of God, yet you were tempted just as we are. You are the giver of life, yet you endured the darkness of death. You are the Lord of Lords, yet you were crowned with thorns. You are enthroned on high, yet you consented to be brought low. In what the world would count as weakness, you displayed true strength – how we praise you.

How we praise you for your love that can turn human expectations upside down, and we rejoice in everything this means for us today. For when we are weak, you are strong. When we feel most hopeless, you are most powerful. When we can do little, you can do much – how we praise you.

Father, we praise you for the example you have shown to us in Jesus, the model we see in him of faithful service. For the dedication, he showed throughout his ministry; the fact he was not prepared to cut corners or take the easy way out, but rather he confronted injustice and evil head to head and face to face.

Forgive us, Gracious God, that we do not always follow his example. We turn a blind eye to what we know to be wrong, even bending the rules to suit ourselves.

We go along with the crowd rather than face being thought of as “different”. We close our eyes and our ears to what we would rather not think about. We wash our hands of difficult decisions, claiming it is none of our business, opting for the easier path. Father, cleanse and renew us.

Sovereign God, Servant God, we praise you, that despite everything which conspires against you, everything which frustrates your purposes, your will shall ultimately triumph, nothing will be able to overcome your goodness or extinguish your love for us in Christ. May we live each day in that conviction, bringing glory and honour to you.

For all this we ask in Jesus’ name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that 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 forever. Amen.

### **All-age Talk**

Jesus on the night before he died got his closest friends together around a table to eat some supper. There was a taxman, some fishermen, a freedom fighter and a betrayer. Not the sort of people who would be invited to supper at the Roman Emperor’s Palace. They were not important enough. But to Jesus everyone is important. As they ate and drank and talked and laughed, Jesus decided that it was time for him to tell them and then show them something that was important.

Jesus took some bread and broke it and then he took a cup of wine after they had eaten and drank from it. And then Jesus asked his friends to do this often to remember him, so they would never forget what he did for us and how we can be forgiven through him.

For the bread – reminds us of Jesus body broken for us and the wine – reminds us of Jesus blood shed for us. So today we eat, and we drink to remember Jesus, to remind ourselves of what he did for us and does for us every day.

## ***Share the bread and wine***

Let's pray together; Loving God, thank you for calling us your friends. Thank you for inviting us to come and eat and drink with you today to remember all that you have done for us. Thank you, that you came to offer us a new beginning. Remind us that you came to save us because you love us all. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## **Hymn 443 – He is Lord, he is Lord;**

### **Readings: Jeremiah 23: 1 – 6**

#### **Hope for the Future**

<sup>1</sup>How terrible will be the LORD's judgement on those rulers who destroy and scatter his people! <sup>2</sup>This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the rulers who were supposed to take care of his people: "You have not taken care of my people; you have scattered them and driven them away. Now I am going to punish you for the evil you have done. <sup>3</sup>I will gather the rest of my people from the countries where I have scattered them, and I will bring them back to their homeland. They will have many children and increase in number. <sup>4</sup>I will appoint rulers to take care of them. My people will no longer be afraid or terrified, and I will not punish them again. I, the LORD, have spoken."

<sup>5</sup>The LORD says, "The time is coming when I will choose as king a righteous descendant of David. That king will rule wisely and do what is right and just throughout the land. <sup>6</sup>When he is king, the people of Judah will be safe, and the people of Israel will live in peace. He will be called 'The LORD Our Salvation'.

### **Luke 23: 33 – 43**

<sup>33</sup>When they came to the place called "The Skull", they crucified Jesus there, and the two criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. <sup>34</sup>Jesus said, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing."

They divided his clothes among themselves by throwing dice. <sup>35</sup>The people stood there watching while the Jewish leaders jeered at him: “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah whom God has chosen!”

<sup>36</sup>The soldiers also mocked him: they came up to him and offered him cheap wine, <sup>37</sup>and said, “Save yourself if you are the king of the Jews!”

<sup>38</sup>Above him were written these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals hanging there hurled insults at him: “Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

<sup>40</sup>The other one, however, rebuked him, saying, “Don't you fear God? You received the same sentence he did. <sup>41</sup>Ours, however, is only right, because we are getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong.” <sup>42</sup>And he said to Jesus, “Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!”

<sup>43</sup>Jesus said to him, “I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.”

### **Sermon – ‘Christ is King’**

‘Do as I say, not as I do.’ It is easy to empathise with sentiment behind these words, for probably, most of us are all too aware of the gulf between the principles we claim to follow and those we actually live by. ‘Don’t be put off,’ we want to tell others; ‘look at the theory rather than the practice.’ Of course, they do not because actions invariably speak louder than words.

For, we can talk about faith all we like. We can speak of God’s love and His care for all until we are blue in the face. It will count for nothing if the way we live puts across a different message. Our faith needs to show itself in the things we do and the people we are. Only then will people stop and take notice. To use another old saying: ‘Precepts may lead, but examples draw.’

Now in the Christian year, we are on the very last Sunday of the year. Next week a new year begins when we begin the Season of Advent, and we also begin a season of waiting. Yet today we finish off the current year with the Reign of

Christ Sunday, or to give it its other title, Christ the King Sunday. Perhaps, you remember from last year – what a strange and sudden twist it is to be plunged into the last days of Christ’s life on earth, just as we get ready to wait on His birth.

For over the last couple of months, we have looked at the concept of giving in 2 Corinthians, we have thought about harvest, we have paused to remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Today we asked to push out the distractions that demand our time and attention, forget for an hour or so our busy lives and concentrate on one question: who is this Jesus that we are about celebrate? Who is this man – this God – this King – that we will spend the next month or so anticipating His birth?

Today’s Gospel reading takes us to Golgotha, the place of the skull. Here, in Luke’s account, the actual process of crucifying Jesus merits just a passing clause in a sentence: *‘they crucified Jesus there’*. However, the details come in Jesus’ interaction with the two criminals that are crucified alongside Him. On one side, the criminal seems to harass Jesus, even at the last, questioning Him.

However, the other criminal takes a different stance, declaring that the two criminals are only justly paying the price for their crimes, but that Jesus *‘has done no wrong.’* He goes onto ask Jesus to remember him when He comes into His Kingdom, and Jesus responds that truly that day this man will be with Him in Paradise.

Which leads me to wonder, for a day when we celebrate Christ as King, our Gospel reading shows us a Jesus who seems most ‘un-kingly’. For He is mocked, beaten, suffering, harassed, murdered. Is Jesus King? We need some perspective. One theologian writes that this Sunday is not about the fact that Jesus is a King, but about the fact that Jesus is the King.

This Sunday celebrates the fact that it is Jesus Who is supposed to be placed as King, or the highest authority in our lives. The theologian goes on: ‘it keeps occurring to me that at this time, there WAS a King of the Jews – Herod – who may have been unpopular amongst Galileans and some others, but had done

some pretty good business on behalf of Rome and Jerusalem, was properly ruthless and self-protective in his political dealings, etc. He was the 'rightful' king. I hear, maybe, Pilate asking Jesus, 'You think that YOU are the king of the Jews? I KNOW the king of the Jews, and he is nothing like you!'

If we return to our Gospel reading at this point then, it is the interaction between Jesus and the criminals that really catches my attention. We read that the first criminal "hurled" insults at Jesus saying, "*Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*" What this criminal does and says, may not capture our attention within our translation of the Bible. Yet, the Greek word used here has an interesting connotation that may catch our attention. This word we read as "hurled" comes from a word that is also often translated as "to blaspheme", but means specifically, "to speak lightly of sacred things."

What does it mean to speak lightly of sacred things? We do not know what else this criminal may have said to Jesus, but what he has said should cause us to question what exactly is going on here. Are his questions strange? Are his questions of Jesus so unwarranted?

After all, here, next to him, is the One some have been calling the Messiah, God's Son, "King of the Jews", as the inscription with the charge against Jesus reads. And yet, the criminal is somehow speaking lightly of sacred things. He is missing the point, or ignoring it, or not seeing it, or refusing to see the situation before him for what it really is. Notice the number of times the word save is used. The people stand by, and they mock Jesus: '*He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah whom God has chosen!*' Then the soldiers: '*Save yourself if you are the king of the Jews!*' And then we come to the first criminal: '*Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*'

The question, then, is, what does it mean to be saved? What would it have meant for Jesus to save Himself? Would He save Himself by calling down the angels to take Him away from the suffering on the Cross? Would He be saving himself, if He claimed the charges against Him were false, and went back to Galilee? Imagine, Jesus was only in His thirties – would it not have been great if He could have taught for decades more, taught us more, set us straight and

made sure we had it right before He was crucified? However, I imagine that by avoiding death on the Cross, even if He had escaped these charges, Jesus would not have been saving Himself, but destroying Himself.

For Jesus' constant message to anyone who would listen was to love God and love their neighbour. He taught a way of peace that radically urged a complete change of lifestyle for those who truly wanted to be Disciples. What would it mean, then, to abandon it all for His own personal safety? A true leader must walk the walk and practice what they preach. Jesus did just that and in doing so, offered us a model for salvation as well.

Then we have the second criminal. I am not sure what he saw in Jesus, how he was able to recognise Who Jesus was. We know, by his own admission, that he was not a perfect man. Yet, he recognises his own faults, and Jesus' innocence. He sees something more, knows something about Jesus' identity, because he says, *'Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!'* Jesus' response is better than this man could have hoped for, *'I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.'*

Jesus, it seems, speaks of a present and right-now paradise that He can offer this man. After all, we know that Jesus does not rise from the dead until the third day, and that He ascends to be with God at least forty days later. So, for Jesus to promise this immediate paradise, He must have something different in mind from what we would usually consider. Jesus has been preaching about God's Kingdom, God's reign, being at hand, already present. In His last interaction with this second criminal, He confirms it – paradise is now – if we see it, if we usher it in. The Kingdom of God is for today.

So, what does Christ the King Sunday mean for us? What do we take away with us on this last Sunday in the Christian year? First and foremost, we find grounding for our lives. It is Christ Who is our King, As Christians, we have our base already established, the foundation of our being. Christ the King. Christ Who reigns. When we remember where our centre is, we are not so easily distracted by other things that want to claim our attention and allegiance. We

know who we are and who leads us in the decisions we make, in the paths we choose, in the lives we live.

Secondly, we are reminded again about what it means to be saved. Our own salvation does not always mean our personal safety, or a place reserved for us in the clouds of heaven. Jesus' teachings were full of paradoxes, and so were His actions. Sometimes, He taught, the way to save your life was to lose it, and He did just that. Sometimes, the only way to be saved is the hard way – by giving ourselves up. Perhaps we do not need to suffer the death that Christ suffered but we can seek to live as He lived, to do as He taught. The paradox is that by putting others first, by caring for our neighbour, by loving others, we save ourselves in the best way possible.

Thirdly, we are reminded to be careful when it comes to speaking lightly of the things, we hold sacred. During the Advent Season, which is fast approaching, we will be pressured day after day to make light of what we hold sacred, by letting our reason for celebrating Christmas become obscured. We make light of the sacred whenever we let commercialism overrule the faithful celebration of Christmas. Be on your guard – do not make light of sacred things. Do not water down your faith and our story for a cheaper imitation that will lose its lustre by the time New Year rolls round.

Finally, take heart. We do not have to wait to experience the paradise that the second criminal asks Jesus about. Today, Jesus says. Today, we can enter paradise. Here and now, we can experience God's Kingdom, made present on Earth, the Good News made manifest amongst us. For we are called to make that same paradise a reality in this present moment, as Jesus did for the second criminal.

We are called to point to the reality of Jesus' Kingship in the here and now, not to point to it as some oft-promised reward for our perseverance. We can see beyond the lies of this world to the one beyond, because we can see the meaning of the Cross. Rejoice, God is here, right now, in this very place. Rejoice, for Christ is the King.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Hymn CH4 466 – Before the throne of God above**

### **Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Gracious God, we cannot thank you enough for your great goodness, yet the truth is we rarely thank you at all, your gifts taken for granted, your blessings scarcely noted. We thank you for this opportunity to put that right – this chance not only to say thank you but to show our gratitude in action through this offering or our money. You have provided for us so richly; gratefully we respond in the name of Christ.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we thank you for the life of your world and for the life you have given us; for the beauty and wonder of all your creation and that we have a chance to discover and enjoy it. Father, we thank you not only for giving us life, but also for giving us new life and hope.

We want to thank you for all that you have done for us in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; for his life and ministry on this earth; for his teaching about your kingdom and for his stories that made your love real. We praise you for his death for us in our place as our Saviour and for his rising again as our Lord. We thank you that we can come on the first day of the week and celebrate again his mighty resurrection.

Father, it is because of Christ that we can come. It is because of what he has done that we can come into your almighty presence. He has opened the way into life that is real and into knowing you as our Father. Enable us not only to thank you but, by your grace, to live thankful lives.

Having prayed for ourselves Father we now bring our prayers for others. We pray for those who are hungry: for those who are hungry for bread; for those who are thirsty for water; for those who live in refugee camps with no control and no power and for those who are hungry due to human foolishness or human greed.

We pray for those who are hungry for life; for those who know only how to take and need to learn how to give; for those who love to receive but have not learned to share; for our own nation, which has received many riches, yet still believes it is poor.

Father we pray for those who are hungry for peace; for those whose hearts and minds are in turmoil; for those whose lives are disrupted by war or hatred, by bitterness or shame, by guilt or failure, by want or despair; for those who are hungry to know the peace of God and experience his presence and joy.

We pray for those who are hungry for love; for those who have never known what it means to be wanted, needed, and appreciated; for those who, like all of us, have needed to know that they are loved, not for what they do or achieve but just simply for being themselves.

We also bring our own hunger for others Father and in this time of quiet we place before you those whom we know who need your presence with you today and throughout the week ahead. May all whom we pray for now feel your loving and healing presence with them...

Almighty God, bring friendship to the lonely, reconciliation to the estranged, harmony to the divided and comfort to the bereaved. In our homes and our families, our country and our world may your love be shared among us bringing hope and healing. Lord in your mercy, reach out in love. All this we pray through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **The Invitation**

The crucified Christ invites us to dine with him. The reigning Christ invites us to take our place at this table. The forgiving Christ makes space for us here and now. So, come. Know yourself welcomed. Know yourself included. Know yourself forgiven. Come and be fed by the one who gave all for us. Come and remember him.

**Hymn CH4 19 – Ye gates, lift up your heads on high;**

## **The Sacrament of Holy Communion**

The night before he died, Jesus gathered his friends around to celebrate Passover. As they ate together, they told stories by which they remembered the origins of their faith.

They remembered how God had rescued the people from Egypt. They remembered how God led them through the wilderness. They remembered how God taught them how to be the people of God in a new land. They remembered how, in every place and time, God's faithfulness accompanied them and enabled them to live in love and in hope and Jesus added a new story.

A story of betrayal and denial. A story of love and death. A story of forgiveness and redemption. And, knowing that around that table were those who would betray him, those who would deny him, those who would run away, still Jesus invited them into that new story of renewed relationship with God.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and blessed it. He broke the bread and said: Take, eat, this is my body broken for you. And he took a cup of wine, saying, This is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Do this to remember me.

We have gifts of bread and wine to share today but let's first give thanks.

## **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God, we thank you that you journey with people in every age. You journeyed with our mothers and fathers, our grandmothers, and grandfathers. You journeyed with all who showed us faith and helped us to make it our own. You journeyed with those who worshipped here in the past, building a community of which we now call ourselves a part.

God, we thank you for your faithfulness, for your inclusion, for your unconditional love. And, as we gather at this table, where we know ourselves welcomed, we bring into this space that you make sacred all who feel abandoned today.

All who feel excluded. All who feel unwelcome. All who feel unloved. In this place, O God, you - and we - make room for all.

God and lover of all creation, we pray for your world where it is hurting and for all whom you created in your likeness. May we hold out light, love, and justice wherever we go, the fruits of being known and loved by you. May we be empowered to empower others. May we be moved to make a difference in the world today, both near and far because of you O God, our hope and our Redeemer, reigning Christ.

And, as we feast, may we share with these people, with this neighbourhood and with this community the many blessings that you heap on us, feeding us that we may feed others.

God send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon this bread and this wine, symbols of your undying love and goodness for the renewal of all creation.

Transform these gifts and transform we who receive, for the sake of the whole world. Amen

### **Breaking & Sharing Bread & Wine**

We now do this in obedience to Christ's example and appointment.

Gathered around an inclusive table, Jesus took bread, broke it, and said: Take, eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this to remember me. We eat our bread together.

After feeding minds and bodies, Jesus took the cup and said: This cup is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you in remembrance of me. We do this to remember him.

### **The Peace**

The peace of the Father of joy; the peace of the Christ of hope; the peace of the Spirit of grace, may the Lord's peace be with you all. Amen.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion**

Christ who reigns over all, you have invited us, welcomed us, you have forgiven us, you have fed us. May we now go into the world, into our neighbourhood, into our community with the food of love that feeds all and excludes none. May we live alongside our neighbour, sharing the abundance you provide until all are fed, all are loved, and all have a place to call home. May the food by which you have fed and blessed us feed and bless your whole creation as we are made one in your love.

One Lord. One hope. One faith. Amen.

**Hymn CH4 436 – Christ triumphant, ever reigning,**

### **Benediction**

Go now, out into the world, a world reigned by earthly leaders. Go, proclaiming God's kingdom. Show grace and mercy to all people. Serve your brothers and sisters, as Jesus did. Comfort all in need as the Spirit guides you. So, may the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.