

Sunday 22nd November 2020

Worship prepared by Liz and Mary from Edward Street URC.

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love. God is ever present, around us and within us, though separate let us worship together in God. © Heather Whyte

Come let us praise the Lord! Let us sing for joy to God who protects us! Let us come before him with thanksgiving and sing joyful songs of praise. For the Lord is a mighty God, a mighty king over all the gods.

Suggested Hymn: God is love, his the care

Listen [here](#)

Prayers (using Psalm 95)

Eternal God, we come to be together in Your presence this morning. Wherever we have been this week, wherever we may be next week, here, now, we are at one with each other and with You.

Amazing God, You rule over the whole earth, from the deepest caves to the highest hills. You rule over the sea, which You made; the land also which You formed. Come, let us bow down and worship You, our creator God. For You are our God; You care for us and we are Your flock for whom You provide. We thank You for the joy of the autumn sunshine, highlighting the glorious colours as the cycle of nature turns its never ending circle. We know that Your hand is at work in the turning of the seasons, just as it is at work in the cycle of our lives.

Generous God, we thank You for all the blessings which You give to us. We have homes with warmth and shelter; we have food and drink to sustain us; we have friends and family to support us. Forgive us when we take such things for granted and moan about our daily trials. Too often we say and do things which are thoughtless and do not show Your love. Too often we do not say or do things which would help others and would show Your love to them. We ask Your forgiveness in the knowledge that through the love You showed to us in Jesus, we are restored, renewed and forgiven.

Thank You loving God, for all the wonders of this world and all the blessings of our lives freely given. May we in return always try to walk the way of Jesus, Your Son, our friend and guide who taught us how to pray together.

The Lord's Prayer

Introduction



I wonder what you see in the pictures? Obviously we haven't chosen random images. You may have expected or at least not be surprised by the shepherd's crook or the crown of thorns. Maybe you're not surprised by the golden crown, but the lifebelt?

Today is the Sunday of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the Christian year before Advent begins next Sunday. A King needs a crown. We know Jesus is no ordinary King, he was the servant King and accepted the crown of thorns. The kings of Israel were traditionally seen as shepherds of their flock. Jesus was and is

the good shepherd - a good shepherd after some very dodgy kings, a shepherd who saves and rescues us - hence the lifebelt!

So where are we? We are gathered into the fold within the symbols, well, safe and gathered, held in the care of the good shepherd, the crucified Jesus, Christ the King, our saviour. Not only that, we have a part to play in gathering and enfolding others into the safety of that fold. Sent out in fact to serve and to walk the way to help others to enter into the fold.

Reading: Ezekiel 34: 11 - 24

Suggested Hymn: The Lord's My Shepherd (Tune - Crimond)

Watch [here](#)

Reading: Matthew 25: 31 - 46

Reflection

The links between today's readings are perhaps more obvious than they sometimes are! Both talk about the need for folk to be cared for, of God's caring for all God's people and of people not always treating one another in a caring way.

In Ezekiel's day there had been some poor kings. Traditionally Israel's kings had been seen as shepherds of the flock, but these kings had exploited, ignored and failed to care for the people. There were also some poor sheep - people who became rich and fat by exploiting their fellows and preventing them from thriving. These were difficult times; the people had been exiled from their homeland for many long years, yet still the leaders and the people were not pulling together and looking out for one another. God promises to judge, to restore the people, to be the sovereign and saving God.

The Matthew story may well have its roots in the Ezekiel passage. The parallels are clear. God's blessings will be showered on the righteous, but the others will be harshly judged. This poses all sorts of problems for us when we base our understanding on a loving God who forgives, accepts and frees us up to try again. Some writers think the sheep in Matthew's story are the believers and the goats are the unbelievers who harmed the believers. Others see the sheep and goats as groups from all of us, the goats being like Ezekiel's fat or selfish sheep depriving their fellows. What can it mean for us, and how does it fit with our understanding of a God of love and mercy rather than of judgement and vengeance?

The Matthew readings over the past few weeks have been about being prepared. This one is similar. Paul may have thought we should live by faith alone, whereas James writes of the need for action. This passage from Matthew embraces both those views. Jesus is saying it is not just faith - even the goats called the King, Lord - it is also outreach. The sheep were not aware they had responded to Jesus' hunger or thirst, to Jesus' exclusion, need, illness or imprisonment when they responded generously to those they had met. Those on the left had not knowingly ignored Jesus, but had been blind to the needs of those around them. Outreach to others not for gain or show, but done instinctively to those in need is what is required. Neither group was aware that their lives and actions were being judged as having been directed at the known Jesus - it was their instinctive lives and actions towards each and everyone they met which were judged as if directed - directly at Jesus.

I am reminded of one of my Dad's stories. A long time ago there were two monks, and one day the Abbott told them that he was sending them to a far off village to spread the word of God. The older monk wasn't too pleased, as he was involved in copying and illustrating a Gospel. When the two brothers arrived in the village, the older monk said to his companion, "I am busy with God's work, and I need to finish copying and illustrating the Gospel. You set up the house, go out to get us food and keep the garden here, while I continue my important work. When I am finished, we can start spreading the word of God." Each day he toiled away in daylight and by candlelight copying and illustrating a beautiful version of the Gospel. The younger monk walked the three or so miles to the village each day to buy food, and he kept the house comfortable for his brother.

After many months the manuscript was complete, but the weather was bad so the brothers had to stay in the cottage for about a week. When it cleared, the older monk said to the younger monk, "Tomorrow we will go to the village and talk to the people about God." The next day they walked together to the village; the older monk looked for a place to stand to address the folk. When he looked round, he couldn't see his

brother monk. But then he did. The younger monk was surrounded by villagers, greeting him, talking to him, offering him vegetables, calling him over to see a newly shod horse or a mended roof.

An older man approached the older monk. "Who are you?" he asked. "I have come to tell you of God's love," the monk answered. The older man smiled. "You're welcome, but we already know about God's love. That young monk over there has been living and working with us for many months now. He has shared in our lives, and he has shown us God's love."

We need to be prepared for what and whom we may meet each day, now more than ever when so many are struggling with isolation and uncertainty. Mary Glover, a worker in a food project in Washington DC, prayed each day before the doors were opened, "Lord, we know you'll be coming through this line today, so help us to treat you well." We need to be prepared to connect with the people we meet - even to go out of our way to connect with those we cannot meet at this time. And then pray that we are ready to make an open response to those situations and to those people as we strive to walk the way of Jesus. Amen

Prayers

Loving God, we come to You now with our prayers for the world, for the situations which trouble and concern us, for the people who need our understanding and support. We pray also that, as we meet people in the coming days, we might be able to see through Your eyes and walk in Your way.

Loving God, **may we see through Your eyes and respond with Your love.**

We pray for those who are overwhelmed by burdens of responsibility, for those who seek to find ways to manage, to administer, to provide solutions to the difficulties we currently face. May we be aware of the challenges they face and look to support them constructively, rather than criticise harshly.

Loving God, **may we see through Your eyes and respond with Your love.**

We pray for those who are working way beyond their remit to tend and to care for others, for those key workers doing extra hours and shifts for our benefit, for those finding ways to prevent loneliness, for those seeking medical solutions to create a safer future. May we show our appreciation of their efforts and support for their work, not take them for granted.

Loving God, **may we see through Your eyes and respond with Your love.**

We pray for those in need, for those who have been laid low by the current situation - emotionally, physically, mentally, financially. May we try to find practical ways to help them and to show compassion, not indifference.

Loving God, **may we see through Your eyes and respond with Your love.**

We pray for those who are victims: victims of injustice, conflict, abuse, discrimination, exclusion. May we work for peace, for inclusion, for understanding, for fairness, rather than assume that others will do it for us.

Loving God, **may we see through Your eyes and respond with Your love.**

We pray for our families and friends, for those we love and care about, for those who are close to us and those who are far away, for the people we know and for the people we don't know. May we reach out to all folk with the same openness and welcome, showing no rejection or lack of concern.

Loving God, **may we see through Your eyes and respond with Your love.**

Loving God, You sent us Your Son to show us how to see the world through Your eyes, how to act with Your understanding and how to respond with Your love. May we always walk the way of Jesus in whose name we pray, Amen.

Our offering to God

As we continue to worship apart but together, let us pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church by continuing to send our offering and exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know God's blessing on all we do. Amen

Hymn: Lord, speak to me, that I may speak (Tune – Fulda, play tune [here](#), allow first verse for intro)

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| 1 | Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
In living echoes of thy tone;
As thou hast sought, so let me seek
Thy straying children lost and lone. | 2 | O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet;
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet. |
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3 O strengthen me, that, while I stand
Firm on the rock, and strong in thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea.

5 O fill me with thy fullness, Lord,
Until my very heart o'erflow
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Thy love to tell, thy praise to show.

4 O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things thou dost impart;
And wing my words, that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.

6 O use me, Lord, use even me,
Just as thou wilt, and when, and where,
Until thy blessèd face I see,
Thy rest, thy joy, thy glory share.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

Blessing

We go our ways as people of God;
We go prepared and open, ready to respond to those we meet;
We go as God's people to serve and to walk the way of Jesus.
As we go, we go with God and God goes with us. Amen