**Worship for Sunday 22nd November 2020 prepared by**

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**Who do you say I am?**

**A gathering prayer:**

Lord, you welcomed the man next to you on his cross.
We draw near to you, sure of your kindness and forgiveness and thankful for the way you welcome us.
Amen.

**Hymn: Singing The Faith 313: Thine be the Glory https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbBOOmkMLmI**

**Prayers:** **Thanksgiving:**

Jesus our King, thank you for staying kind when people disrespected you.
Thank you for being someone who listens prays and forgives.
Jesus our King, you are the King of love and we praise you. You are the King of love and we worship you. **Amen.**

**Prayer of Confession:**

Lord, You call us to a life of mercy, justice and humility –but we do not always live like this.
You call us to a life of welcome –but we do not always welcome.
You call us to a life of solidarity –but we do not always offer a helping hand.
Have mercy on us, O God, for the times we have failed, and for the times we have failed to care.
For your name’s sake, and your mercy’s sake.
**Amen.** ***(These 3 prayers including leaving prayer are taken from Roots)***

**Readings: Prvbs 3v 6,****Matt 28.vs20, Matthew 26 vs 26-43,****(Luke 23.26-43).**

Who do you say that I am? If I had the courage to ask you to answer the same question would I like the responses? You might even think that I am either wishing to boost my own ego, or its opposite that I need a morale lift or just off my rocker. A simple straight forward answer could be “you are you; you always have been, and you always will be.”  This, however, may imply that there is no room for personal growth or development.

 The high priest at the trial of Jesus finding difficulty eliciting an answer prompts Jesus by putting a question to him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed one”? To which Jesus replies, “And you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty one and coming on the clouds of heaven”. At this point the high priest tore his clothes, “why do you need any more witnesses?” Often when confronted with the truth it can disturb, disrupt, creating a hostile reaction. It can also have the opposite effect like some of the crowds at Jesus crucifixion when ‘people just stood by, watching’. Why? Were they inactive before such horror? Was it that they feared the jeering crowds? Are they too, unspeakably horrified to move, rooted to the spot in a paralysis of annihilated hope and purpose?   Then there’s the response of the faithful criminal’s plea “Remember me” was it that he didn’t need to ask or answer the question for in his dying moments he had come to a faith and understanding of who Jesus is?

Put in the same situation how would we have reacted? In a place of public execution, of noise, violence and fear, the leaders and the soldiers mocking Jesus and where objection and protest are now futile?

It is a difficult question to answer when we are faced with it.  “Who do you say that I am?” Particularly when sometimes we can either be surprised or disappointed in ourselves.

Conversely, earlier on, Peter not fully understanding the implication of his answer to the question went straight in with “the Messiah, the son of the living God.” Peter is the first person to realise this.

Jesus then tells Peter that he will build his Church and give him the keys of heaven.  For Peter this was heartfelt, often known as his ‘confession of faith’ but in his reply there is also a sense of naivety as to what a follower of Jesus might entail. For when Jesus foretells of his pending death Peter forbids that it should be, and subsequently receives a stern rebuke from Jesus. Also, in the courtyard, as foretold by Jesus he would deny his Lord three times. Yet, Jesus knew Peter would grow in faith and trust and be given a lead in the kingdom of God.

When Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?” he is not just asking the disciples.  That question is asked of us as well.  Who do we say that Jesus is? Who do I say that he is?

Today is known in the lectionary as ‘Christ the King’ Sunday.

Jesus in the way he lived out his life turned the concept or definition of kingship ‘Upside down’. Right from the start his unconventional way of entering the world by being born into a family and a community of poverty challenges the norm, more amazingly he is later to be hailed as our saviour and our King but not in the conventional way of our understanding.

The faithful criminal’s plea ‘Remember me’ echoes Jesus’ own words just hours earlier: ‘Do this in remembrance of me’. Sharing bread and wine as a symbol of his own impending sacrifice was one of Jesus’ final actions before the ‘gear shift’ of his passion. He used those final moments to set a pattern for us to identify with his mission. Within hours, the same words, from a dying criminal’s lips, marks his own coming into Jesus’ kingdom. Recalling, remembering (putting back together) is a constant process, and one that reforms our identity. It links us with Christ in this world and gives us hope of a place in his kingdom to come.

Despite the mocking of the crowds and one of the criminals on the cross, the power of the resurrection was active. Even when Jesus breathed his last the centurion nearby recognised who Jesus was when he said “surely this man is the Son of God” in contrast the other criminal expresses faith, hope and trust when given assurance of his redemption as a sinner!

Rather than retaliate in an aggressive way Jesus humbled and surrendered himself which raises the question who demonstrated real inner strength, courage, and fortitude throughout this momentous event?

How do we react when we are under pressure or boxed into a corner? Do we seek to curse or bless when we are in extreme situations?

At the point of death, Jesus fulfils his divine mission, to seek and save the lost; he remains true to his core identity as Saviour and brings salvation to a criminal. “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” These were the words of Jesus to the dying criminal on the cross. Paradise is an image of God’s garden, a new Eden, and an end-time image of a new creation.

I wonder if Jesus were to answer his own question “Who do you say I am” what it would be? I suspect it would be I and the Father are one, My heavenly Father dwells in me and I in him”

Clear evidence of this is when Jesus was in the desert being tempted by the devil and on the cross taunted by those around him on his last breath could still say “Father forgive them for they no not what they do”. On both occasions he was at his lowest ebb where he so easily could have thrown in the towel. What it indicates is the close relationship they have with one another. God trusted his son to fulfil the redemption of mankind and Jesus had faith that his Father would stand by him to the end.

How close a relationship do we have with God and Jesus? Is it an abiding and lasting relationship that we know is with us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves? Is it where we can place our trust, faith, and confidence, because we are reassured that God and Jesus are with us? *(In all your ways acknowledge him as Lord and he will make your paths straight Prvbs 3v 6)* and (*Matt 28.vs20 Surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age)*

The crown of thorns, the inscription on the cross, the words of the leaders, soldiers and criminal are a mockery of Christ’s kingship, they speak of a wayward world, out of touch with its creator. Yet, ironically, when untwisted, they define Jesus’ power. They reveal his identity of who is.

In the increasing secularism and individualism of Western society today, faith is often ridiculed, and the Church’s preaching of repentance and forgiveness is rejected as interference. The search for personal meaning and purpose that drives the relentless pursuit of individualism is a search for the fullness of life to which only Jesus can bring. The challenge for us is to embrace and communicate that which is rejected by the world - the example of Christ. For only then can we know our identity, find fuller meaning and understanding of life, to experience true inner fulfilment and to live in harmony with one another.

In Christ the King, we are encouraged to review our thinking about Kingship and leadership. Jesus, when on earth, preached and taught about a different kind of Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven. In our earlier reading in Luke, we see that his Kingdom is not about power and wealth, but about seeing people fulfilling their potential (like the mustard seed), people loving one another and supporting each other. We discover this in the way he gathered his disciples around him, and the way they began to build a community in his name after he died and rose to heaven – hence the formation of the early Christian church.

How accountable are we with the use of power, or do we subtly use it to coerce others?
Can you think of times where you have slipped into being a bystander to avoid getting involved in a messy situation? What images does the word ‘king’ suggest for you? Jesus who himself was falsely accused and unjustly punished challenges us to stand out against injustices for those who are unfairly treated or marginalised. Coincidentally, I came across a quotation recently by James Finley. “You are not what has happened to you. Only Love has the final word in who you are.”  That love is clearly demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ. A final note from the letter of 1 John Chpt 2 Vs24 “See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you will also remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what is promised-even eternal life.” Amen

**Intercessory Prayers** Heavenly Father, we find ourselves living in difficult times, we cannot begin to make sense of it. We bring to you the unease and sadness around the world, the inequalities and discrimination where some either do not have a roof over their heads, let alone wonder where the next meal will come from whilst the rich and powerful disregard their plight. Through the pandemic, this has created sadness, loss of loved ones even loss of their own identity, loneliness, redundancy, and great stress. May all those in the caring profession be surrounded by your love and they too, know they are cared and thought about through our prayers. Hopefully, the strides made in the research and production of the vaccine will reverse the tragic loss of life. Heavenly Father there is so much which troubles disturbs and confuses us, so much hurt and pain surround us.

We confess we do not understand all your ways or know all your thoughts.

Yet we also see the signs of hope through those who tirelessly and unselfishly have given their skills, time, and patience to help those in need. Those in the front line, the NHS, doctors, nurses, surgeons, and carers. We have too, seen a great community spirit where efforts and skills have been combined. During this period however, there has been much time for reflection, a reassessment of our priorities, seeing each day as a gift from you, to show more patience, be more tolerant of others and be quick to forgive. There have been more opportunities to be creative and to gain more skills.

Yet we know that in Jesus, you have shared our humanity, experiencing not just the good but also the bad. You understand what it means to be hurt, to endure suffering, to face even death itself. As well as our joys you have shared our sorrows. Living God, we thank you for the assurance this gives us — that whatever we face you will be with us in it. Today we recognise your kingship and as we draw near to Christmas we are reminded “Emmanuel God is with us” Amen.

**Lords Prayer:**

**Hymn:** **Singing The Faith 330 Joy to the world the saviour has come**

 **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kqi8aphPtNQ**

**Leaving Prayer:** O God, you have made us your people. You have spread your arms wide and welcomed all. Your invitation is always open, always ready to extend and expand.
Send us out, now, in the joy of your inclusion and with the mission of your hospitality for all.
Father, Son and Spirit, you dwell in community and call us to community. Source, Light and Love, you welcome all.
**Amen.**