



The Rule of Love

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **white** cloth or scarf for this special celebration.*

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Light Candle

We light a candle to remember.

We remember Jesus - the Light of the World - the light that shines even in the darkness and cannot be snuffed out.

We remember that we too are called to be Light to the World.

Acknowledgement of Country

We gather on unceded land, sovereign land.

It is the land of the Wodi Wodi peoples.

Their connection with this place is since the beginning, since the Dreamings.

Their connection with this place is ongoing.

We give thanks for the continued care of elders.

We offer our respect.

May we walk faithfully and respectfully on this land.

Introduction

Today is celebrated as the Reign of Christ. It is the last Sunday before we begin a new Church year, launching into our preparations for Christmas next Sunday. Today's festival is a relatively new one, introduced just less than 100 years ago (1925).

It is intended to be the culmination of the cycle of celebrations in the church - we begin with Jesus' birth and end with wrestling with what it means for us to proclaim the reign of Christ in the world today.

Sometimes known as "Christ The King" Sunday, many now wrestle with, and are troubled by, the patriarchal and colonial nature of that term - so today we celebrate by thinking about the many different images and metaphors in the Scriptures with which we can understand and connect with God, and we are reminded of the way Jesus invites us to think about power and the way it is used in the world.

Call to Worship

We gather in the name of Christ:

The faithful witness to God.

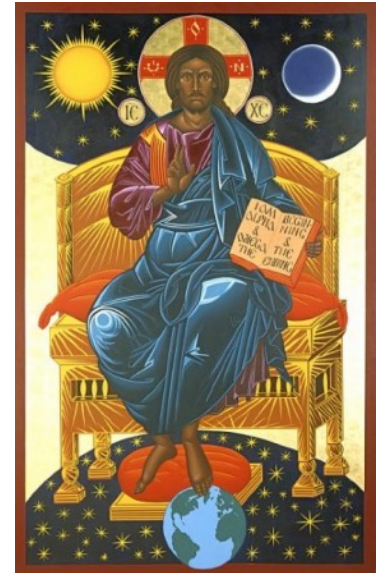
We gather in the name of Christ:

Whom God raised from the dead.

We gather in the name of Christ:

Who loves us and makes us into a body.

We gather in Christ's name.



Come, let us worship!

Let us pray:

God, who is sovereign over all,
Creator of all things and lover of each one,
you meet us here,
you upend our expectations,
you answer our certainties with questions,
you privilege justice over comfort.

Meet us here, O Vulnerable Almighty,
be with us in this time and place,
and challenge us once again to follow after you. Amen.

Sing - Let Us Sing To The God of Salvation (TIS 52)

The hymn we sing is a song of praise. It holds together the idea of God as King with images of the creator and the shepherd. As we sing what is a very familiar hymn for many, I want you to notice the language that is used for God - and think about what that language and the images mean for you - and how they might be heard and understood in the world today...

Let us sing to the God of salvation,
let us sing to the Lord our rock!
Let us come to his house with
thanksgiving,
let us come before the Lord and sing!

*Praise our Maker, praise our Saviour,
praise the Lord our everlasting King.
Every throne must bow before him,
God is Lord of everything!*

In his hands are the earth's deep places
and the strength of the hills is his;
and the sea is the Lord's for he made it,
by his hands the dry land was formed.

Praise our Maker...

Let us worship the Lord our Maker,
let us kneel to the Lord our God;
for we all are the sheep of his pasture,
he will guide us by his powerful hand.

Praise our Maker...

Let today be the time when you hear him!
May our hearts not be hard or cold,
lest we stray from the Lord in rebellion,
as his people did in time of old.

Praise our Maker...

Words: Richard Thomas Bewes

Prayer

God our Maker,
here, in this time and place,
we offer our praise to you.
You - who created the foundations of the earth,
who flung the stars into space,
who shaped the rivers in their courses,
and dabbed colour on the flowers and butterfly wings;
you - who protects us like a shepherd
and who sends us into the world to bear your love.

God, we call you king
and so often we add all the layerings of kings, queens, emperors, and rulers that we see
around us -
wealthy, disconnected...
using force to gain power and subdue others.
We know that you are not like this, but these images surround us.
We know that your way of holding power is not to lord it over others but to
invite the last to be first,
and to call us to transformation and to share in your work.

Forgive us when we forget that the marks of your reign
are justice, peace, compassion, inclusion, and love.
Forgive us when we seek to hold power over others, to bend them to our will.

Forgive us, but do not let us be.
Turn our hearts around,
turn our lives around,
turn our communities around.

Transform us so that we can see and embody different ways of being together,
different ways of holding power,
and different ways of caring for all people, all creatures, and all earth.
Mould us into Jesus' shape, we pray. Amen.

Words of Grace

Hear this greeting and word of grace that John wrote to the churches in Asia:

'Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was and who is to come'

~ Revelation 1:4

God loves you.
God frees you from taking paths that lead away from God.
God makes us into a people.
To God be glory and honour forever and ever.
Hallelujah! Amen!

Sing - Bring Many Names (TIS 182)

This song might be new to you. Rather than focusing on the tune - it has lots of verses so I hope you will pick up the tune by the time we have sung them all - the lyrics invite us to ponder a range of ways we understand and experience God.

Bring many names, beautiful and good,
celebrate, in parable and story,
holiness in glory,
living, loving God.
Hail and hosanna!
bring many names!

genius at play:
Hail and hosanna,
strong mother God!

Strong mother God, working night and day,
planning all the wonders of creation,
setting each equation,

Warm father God, hugging every child,
feeling all the strains of human living,
caring and forgiving
till we're reconciled:
Hail and hosanna,
warm father God!

Old, aching God, grey with endless care,
calmly piercing evil's new disguises,
glad of good surprises,
wiser than despair:
Hail and hosanna,
old, aching God!

Young, growing God, eager, on the move,
saying no to falsehood and unkindness,
crying out for justice,

giving all you have:
Hail and hosanna,
young, growing God!

Great, living God, never fully known,
joyful darkness far beyond our seeing,
closer yet than breathing,
everlasting home:
Hail and hosanna,
great, living God!

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Words: Brian Arthur Wren

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

⁷ Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.
So it is to be. Amen.

⁸ 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Reading: John 18:33-37

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ³⁴ Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' ³⁵ Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' ³⁶ Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' ³⁷ Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Alpha and Omega,
open our hearts and minds to the wonder of your way
open our lives and our hands to generously live the ways of your realm.
In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

When we speak of someone being a "king", what comes to mind?
When we speak of someone "the ruler of the kings of the earth", what comes to mind?

Someone sitting on a throne.
Someone with great power.
Perhaps someone who is a bit removed from the realities many of us face from day to day.
Perhaps someone who has ambitions for expanding their influence.

If you consider any of the icons of the church that depict Jesus as "King",
they are usually painted in gold to indicate wealth,
he is often sitting on a throne,
one one hand, he might be holding a staff with an orb on top - like the one given to King
Charles at his coronation - symbols of supreme authority;
or he might be holding a church - a sign that he is the ruler of the church;
or in the case on the screen, holding the words that link to our reading from Revelation 1;
his other hand is often held in a gesture of blessing;
and his footstool? Under his feet - is the earth - again a symbol of subjugation.

But how do we hold these images in a world where peoples have been colonised,
dispossessed and their culture and languages denuded by the kingdoms and empires of
this world?

How do we hold these images as we watch the leaders of nations wrestle one another for
power and prestige with little care for the people caught in the middle?

How do we hold these images when our nation is ambivalent, at best, to being subject to
the British monarchy, and generally hold the whole idea with a good deal of scepticism and
irrelevance?

How do we hold these images when we believe in democracy and the right of all people to
determine their own government and leadership?

And how do we hold these images alongside the words of Jesus as he faces Pilate?

When Pilate questions him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (18:33). Jesus does not give
him a direct answer.

"Is that your own question," asks Jesus, "or has someone put you up to asking?" (18:34)

Pilate tries to flick blame to the Jewish leaders (18:35).

But the only concession Jesus gives is to say, "My kingdom is not from this world."

If it were, my followers would rise up now and fight for my release. But that is not what I
am about. (18:36)

Pilate attempts to push him, but Jesus has shifted the conversation and intentionally does
not name himself as "king". Instead Jesus says that the title of king is your's, Pilate. What
I am here for, is to testify to the truth. And those who are interested in truth, they listen to
me. (18:37)

When we speak of who we believe Jesus to be, this is one area where I do think we need
to be very careful in the language we use and in explaining what we mean - because the
assumptions and baggage that attach to these concepts can quickly become entangled in
ways that quickly become unhelpful. Why?

Because Jesus himself says time and again that his realm is not what we have come to expect from the rulers of the world we live in.

The idea of Christ as “King of kings and Lord of lords”, the “ruler of all the kings of the earth” is not about wealth and power and making decisions and rules for people to follow.

Jesus is very clear, time and again, he is not about “lording it over others” (Mark 10:42), but about becoming the servant of all. And if we want to follow Jesus then we must do and be likewise.

The realm that Jesus ushers in, that God intends for the world is one of mercy and compassion, of justice and of peace. It is not won by violent conflict or by having enough money to buy what we want. It is won in sharing the kind of love that will give all of itself for the sake of another.

And if we are serious about participating in and expanding God’s reign on earth, then God’s people will be people of extravagant love, of radical justice, of endless mercy and grace, we will call those who rule and govern in this world to reflect the ways of Jesus, and we will give all of ourselves to that work.

When we say “Christ is King”, we are saying that the way of Jesus, the way of love is the way of truth.

We are saying that the way of Jesus will always be the better way for the world.

When we declare “Christ the King”, we are proclaiming hope - that the powers of this world will not have the last say.

And so as we gather at this table, we say no to wealth and power that divides and conquers.

We say no to violent conflict, to abuse and to the taking of anything that is not our’s - land, culture, language, life.

We say no to the exclusion of people who don’t fit or can’t work or who are different from us.

At this table, we celebrate a community that welcomes everyone with no strings attached.

At this table, we celebrate the One who invited us into a way that is directed by love for God and love for the people around us, a way that lifts the vulnerable and where the powerful take their place at the back.

At this table we pray that this glimpse of heaven might be a reality in all our living, in all the world.

Let us pray,

O God,

May “your kingdom come”,

may “your will be done on earth as in heaven.”

May we proclaim and live the rule of love in our own lives and in our life together in this community. And may our living point those around us, our friends and neighbours, to your love, grace, justice and peace. Today and always. Amen.

Responding

Sing - The Servant King (TIS 256)

We sing a song that reminds us that Jesus' realm is not like those of this world, but invites us to offer ourselves as servants to the people around us.

From heaven you came helpless babe,
entered our world your glory veiled;
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears,
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
"Yet not my will, but yours," he said.

This is our God...

Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.
This is our God...

So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him;
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.
This is our God...

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Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

Prayer for Others

God,
we celebrate your presence among us.
You are life-giver.
You are pain-sharer.
You are barrier-breaker.
You are wholeness and mercy and compassion.
Help us to bear these names in the world.

We pray for the places and situations where we cannot see your presence.
Send your Spirit to places of war.
Send your Spirit to situations of violence.
Send your Spirit to places where the earth groans.
Send your Spirit and transform all people, all things.

Dear loving God,
we come to worship in this beautiful Church and we think of how many generations have come here to marry, baptise their children, bury their loved ones - or perhaps have a lightbulb moment when they realise what Jesus taught us to be.
We give thanks for special times, special moments and special memories.

Help us to always welcome the strangers and new people so they will recognise this isn't our house but belongs to each of us. Thank you for the welcome we receive here.

Today our theme is the Reign of Christ which is based on love, not power and violence. Justice and compassion are the essentials, and the following prayer details how we can depend on You when we feel trapped by this world's situation. I'd like to share this prayer with you, and the line in bold is for all of us to say together.

Loving God, there are times when we feel imprisoned,
when other people limit our choices
or force us to do things we believe to be wrong.

God of freedom, be with us.

Loving God, there are times when we feel imprisoned,
when we are shut inside by weather or illness
or when we are caught in a situation we cannot control.

God of freedom, be with us.

Loving God, there are times when we feel imprisoned,
when our fears tie us up inside ourselves
and stop us working or talking to those around us.

God of freedom, be with us.

Loving God, there are times when we have known your freedom,
when we have been helped to stand up to those who imprison us,
when our situation or health changes
and when our fears are gently eased.

God of freedom, we have known your presence with us and we thank you. Amen.

Offering

This part of our service is not about the money.

It is about considering how we will respond to what we have seen and heard and experienced this morning, or perhaps throughout the week - how is God prompting you, nudging you, inspiring you - and what will you do about it?

Each one of us is precious.

Each one of us has something to offer in terms of resources - time, energy, skills, money. How will you respond?

Give us generous hearts and generous lives, O God.
May our offerings help remake the world in your image.
May we be bearers of your love and grace in the world. Amen.

Sending

Sing - Hymn To Christ The Companion (tune: TIS 361)

This song invites us to think about the Jesus who accompanies us as friend and inviting us to be companions to one another in our work of caring for people who are vulnerable and seeking justice.

Where two or three are gathered
here in the name of Christ,
then will we know his presence,
share in a love unpriced.
He will be with us always,
e'en to our journey's end;
found in our humblest neighbour,
present in foe and friend.

Spur us to seek each other,
follow the pilgrim way,
and, if our footsteps falter,
feed and sustain, we pray.
Broken the bread you offer,
shared is the cup you pour,
calling to true communion
now and for ever more.

Forward our path together,
through a mysterious land,
darkened by our unknowing,
desert of rock and sand.
Spirit of Christ before us,
lead us through storm and night;
beacon of hope unfailing,
draw us towards your light.

O loving Christ-companion,
bond us, that we may be
one in our common purpose,
one in our loyalty;
strong for the weak and powerless,
open to truth, and pain,
daring to stand for justice,
working to bring your reign.

C Gibson

Sending and Blessing

Grace to you and peace from God, who is who was and who is to come.

Grace to you and peace from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Grace to you and peace from the Spirit of Love, who transforms you into God's people.

Go into this week with God's blessing in your heart, that you might share it with the work of
your hands. Amen.

Liturgy and Reflections drawn from:

Rev Dr Bec Lindsay, *Liturgy, Life and Learning*, Resources for 24 November 2024

Rev Kath Merrifield
24 November 2024