

## Readings for the Feast of Christ the King

20<sup>th</sup> November 2022

### First Reading: Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

### Second Reading: Colossians 1:11-20

Brothers and sisters: May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

### Gospel: St Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but

this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

### **A Reflection for the Feast of Christ the King**

This Sunday, many of us will be hearing Bishop Mark preach, but for those not receiving an Episcopal visit on this occasion, or who are unable to attend, I offer the following reflection for the Feast of Christ the King.

Monarchy has been somewhat prominent in the news, in this country at least, this year. February saw the late Queen reach her platinum jubilee, a milestone marked by celebrations in the summer. And then in September came her death, and with it a national outpouring of sorrow, memories of a long life and long reign well-lived, and the pomp and ceremony of the State Funeral. With that also came the accession of the new King, Charles III. As he starts to establish himself in his new role, accompanied almost inevitably by comments and comparisons with his mother, so our nation starts to plan for his coronation next year. This will be another occasion of pomp and ceremony, although it has been suggested that it will be somewhat less extravagant than previous coronations, a little more in keeping with the times we find ourselves in.

While the pomp and ceremony often associated with the monarchy of the United Kingdom is more elaborate than that of some other modern monarchies, for example those of the Netherlands or Sweden, all earthly kingships are, of course human, and subject to human limitations and failings. There is a stark contrast between them and the kingship of Christ which we celebrate today.

In the passage from Jeremiah, God denounces the way in which human leaders have failed to protect God’s people. Therefore, God will personally take over the role of the good shepherd and gather the flock. Jeremiah’s vision is of a future time when God will raise up a just king from the house of David called by the name ‘the Lord is our righteousness’, a king who will embody and enact God’s justice and righteousness.

We know that king, foretold by Jeremiah, as Christ, and today’s reading from Colossians celebrates Christ’s reign. In it, we are reminded that Christ is both creator and redeemer, that he is first and foremost and that it is through him that all human institutions and powers come into being. The divisions that so often characterise our human institutions will be eradicated in Christ’s kingdom.

The last verse of this reading from Colossians, and the Gospel account of the Crucifixion, spell out for us the price of Christ’s kingdom, of God’s forgiveness and our reconciliation with God. There is an irony in the inscription over the Cross: ‘This is the King of the Jews’. Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews, the promised Messiah of God foretold by the prophets, and precisely because of that he must not save himself. Yet, even in the midst of his suffering, Jesus offered forgiveness and reconciliation to the repentant criminal alongside him.

Last year, I mentioned that the Feast of Christ the King is one of the most recent in our church calendar, introduced by Pope Pius XI in 1925 and adopted by Anglicans and others. Following the Great War, it was introduced in a time of trauma and upheaval. Many traditional empires and monarchies had been severely challenged or had disappeared, something that raised many questions about status and authority, including that of the Church. And the world was about to head into the economic crisis we now know as the Great Depression.

Times have changed, but once again we find ourselves with war in central Europe and global economic uncertainties surrounding us. To conclude, I would like to share with you some words of the theologian, Canon Rachel Mann, on the significance of this Festival in such times:

'In essence, when we keep the feast of Christ the King we say that it is Christ's sovereignty that has the last word. Though we may live in a world scarred by tragedy and the depredations and grubby compromises of human politics, the failures of this world are not the last word. Jesus Christ is.

The Kingship of Jesus Christ, I think, holds an extraordinary power to speak into our current challenges and travails because Christ's Kingship is not based on lording it over us. The throne on high to which he is lifted should be read through the prism of his subversive kingship. His crown is made of thorns and his seat of authority is either a manger or a cross. He is not the child of privilege or power, but a child born of a couple who were little more than peasants. His kingship is ultimately shown through a willingness to embody love without limit. He offers himself for the sake of the world and redeems it. In his resurrection, lies the promise of reconciliation and the fullness of life.

In the midst of our losses and anxieties, hope kindles. ... We shall find the new day. ... Jesus Christ – the King of the Universe – will be in that new day, inviting us on into service, grace and love. That is the nature of his Kingship: it has been tested in death and tragedy and invites us to join him as friends seeking reconciliation and hope.'