

# Worship 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020 – Christ the King

## Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

### Intimations:

- Next Sunday, the 29<sup>th</sup> November, we plan to open the buildings for services of worship again– in Craigellachie at 9.45am and Aberlour at 11.15am.

Services will not be ‘normal’: they’ll be shorter, and we won’t be able to sing together; we’ll have to limit numbers according to the capacity of the building; it might be chilly because of having doors and windows open to increase ventilation; we won’t be able to shake hands, hug or kiss; and we’ll be seated 2metres away from other households; there’ll be hand gel, and face-coverings, and one-way systems – but it will be worship in-person all the same. Not everyone will feel comfortable with this, and I can assure you that I’ll be continuing online digital services at <http://aberlour.video/services> for everyone to access. These digital services will be as close to identical to the in-person services as is possible.

If you wish to come in person, **you must ‘book’ a place.** This ensures that we keep to a safe capacity for each building as well as giving us ‘track and trace’ details in the event that any potential Covid-19 transmission might be detected. For the 29<sup>th</sup> November, please contact Linda Cordiner.

- Vote to help Aberlour Parish Church win funds!  
This week see the opportunity to vote in a ‘Participatory budgeting’ event which gives you the say over which projects should receive funds for their work. Aberlour Parish Church has bid for funds that would see us be able to create DVDs of our services for those who would like to join us in worship, but currently can’t and who struggle to access the internet services. There are lots of other worthy projects, and you get to vote for 7 of them. A voting form is included here, voting fairly straightforward:
  - 1) You must fill in your details on the form
  - 2) You must put a ‘x’ next to **exactly 7** of the causes (no more, no fewer!) - please include Aberlour Parish Church in your choices!
  - 3) The form can be posted into the voting boxes located at either Craigellachie Filling Station, or outside Gammacks in Aberlour: this should be done by **Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> November.**

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## Introduction

Hello and welcome to worship this Sunday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

For those traditions that follow the cycle of the Christian calendar throughout the year – this is the final Sunday of the year. The cycle begins anew next week with the first Sunday of Advent; and this week – the final week of the year is known as Christ the King Sunday. A Sunday in which we proclaim and celebrate Christ's sovereignty over all creation – and the promise of the coming heavenly kingdom.

Our readings this week help us explore this idea of 'Kingship' in the bible, and also ask us to reflect on what happens when we beg for something that isn't actually good for us.

## Prayer of Approach

God who reigns in heaven,

Yours is the kingdom, the power and glory.

Over and above all you are:

Greater than all goods,

Stronger than all strength,

Wiser than all knowledge.

Beyond all our conceptions, and powers of imagination, you reign in unknowable glory.

And yet, you have come to us: in the person of Jesus Christ, and in the presence of your Spirit, and meet us in a relationship, not of top-down power-to-weakness, but where you lift us, bottom-up from the depths, and look us eye-to-eye, knowing us heart-to-heart.

We have known the depths Lord.

Often our very own words, thoughts, and deeds have caused us to sink

- the hymn writers talk of being 'mired in sin' -

and we know our only hope lies with you, our God and king.

So we confess all that is wrong with us.

Lift us up, Lord God, and forgive us.

And set us on our way with you,

knowing that we have not so much been rinsed of muck and dusted off as completely renewed by your love.

Freed again to live in the strength of your grace.

Amen.

## Readings

## **1 Samuel 8:4-22**

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the LORD, 7 and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. 8 Just as they have done to me,[a] from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. 9 Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

10 So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; 12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. 15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

19 But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, 20 so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.” 21 When Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. 22 The LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice and set a king over them.” Samuel then said to the people of Israel, “Each of you return home.”

## **Reflection**

Sometimes we think we know what we want. Sometimes we think we know what is good for us. Sometimes we won't take no for an answer.

The Israelites were tired of being different from the other nations around them. They'd been led by the Judges, rulers who specifically were not Sovereign, or vested with all political and military power. Rulers who 'judged' between the tribes of Israel and did so in conversation with God.

And it wasn't good enough any more. Other nations went to battle with a king ahead of them, a king who was the one point of authority and who could govern them.

Samuel was the last of the Judges, and he had severe misgivings about the idea of a king. Cynically, we might imagine that he felt he -or at least his family- had much to lose from such an arrangement. But his argument is not one of self-interest, and his complaint before God is one of concern for Israel's wellbeing over his own.

God actually makes clear that it is not Samuel the people are rejecting, but God's own sovereignty. And God has seen the ruin that this rejection brings the people, time and time again. They cut

themselves off from what is good and right, and take a path that is tempting in its allure, but which quickly leads to misery.

I suspect we all know our own version of this story. When we thought we knew what we wanted, and what would be good for us – but that quickly turned sour. I remember well the day my parents relented to my nagging and tantrums and decided to let me have a) as much as I wanted from the pick ‘n’ mix sweets in my paper bag, and b) allowed me to eat as much of my bag as I wanted right then and there. Surprisingly enough, I’ve never really had much of a taste for cola bottles ever since!

That’s maybe a decent childhood lesson learned when it comes to sugar-overload: but we probably also know times when the consequences of our stubborn self-determination have been more serious: when we’ve caused pain to ourselves and others; when things got a good deal worse than an upset tummy.

Samuel could see where the path the Israelites were heading down would take them. He spelled it out to them at length. But they wanted their king. In place of the sovereignty of the unseen Lord God, they chose to have a tangible but all too fallible human being.

And in doing so, they not only caused themselves a good deal of misery that unfolds in the coming years – but they bought into the falsehood and emptiness of human power. They bought into the lie that we’ve been living with ever since: that being a king - a ruler, a leader - is about might and power, about battles won, about growing and maintaining empires and setting yourself apart from others under a royal banner.

We have these kings still today – even in countries which long since departed from formal monarchy. Characters thrust forward as figureheads of a narrow patriotism that shouts ‘We are best – our country, our people – and everyone else can go hang.’ We ourselves often play into creating a society that is about winners and loser, and backing the right leaders that means we win at all costs, no matter who loses out.

Is that really what kingship, what leadership, is about? Is that really what we want? How much has humanity really learned since Israel demanded a king – how often do we, like they did- forget about the One True Sovereign to whom true fealty is owed – the God who created us, and loves us. And what is the cost of our forgetting?

### **John 19:1-6**

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. 2 The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe 3 and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face.

4 Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.” 5 When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”

6 As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!”

## Reflection

You see, the thing about Christ the King Sunday, is that while it is easy for us today to talk of Jesus as our king in worship, his earthly experience of being called king was literally a slap in the face. That while our prayers and hymns are full of royal imagery – we'll shortly sing Crown him with many crowns – the only earthly crown Christ wore was a twisted crown of thorns.

Clearly what it means for Christ to be king is something quite different than we -like the Israelites all those years ago – expect from a king.

In fact it is so different to earthly understandings of kingship that earthly power takes offense at Christ's kingdom. In a few short weeks we'll hear what King Herod did, based on just the rumour of the new Christ-king. Herod sets the mould for the world's approach to a king who taught love, who held up the last and least as the first in the kingdom of heaven, who had grave warnings for the rich and the powerful, and whose love for the people would see the sacrifice of his life and the taking of their sin -our sin- to himself even as they mocked him and called for his crucifixion.

Of course – the crown of thorns is not the end of the story. The end of the story is a risen Christ in heaven in whom we have our salvation and who draws us to union with God. But the crown of thorns does reveal something utterly fundamental about the nature of Christ's rule: a rule founded in sacrificial love, and a rule which upturns all our foolish notions of what true power-in-action looks like. Our narrow understanding of kingship, of worldly power at play, is made ludicrous and exposed as idolatrously heathen when thrown into the light of the crucified and risen Christ.

So this Sunday – and always – let us say:

Christ the King reigns. It is a reign of peace, and of love. It is a reign which banishes all hatred, and call us to communion with God, neighbour, and enemy.

And let us pray:

Christ reign in our hearts – make us subjects who work for your kingdom.

Amen

## Hymn

1 Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless king  
through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save;  
his glories now we sing  
who died and rose on high,  
who died eternal life to bring,  
and lives that death may die.

3 Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified;  
no angels in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
but downward bends their burning eye  
at mysteries so bright.

4 Crown him the Lord of years,  
the potentate of time,  
creator of the rolling spheres,  
ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
for thou hast died for me;  
thy praise shall never, never fail  
throughout eternity.

*Matthew Bridges, 1851.*

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## Prayer

Lord we pray this day for all in need.

For all those

who lack the basics of life

who struggle day by day  
whose woes and anxieties weigh them down  
who mourn or grieve loss  
who are excluded from what they deserve

We pray for all those who lose out because of warped uses of human power  
for those who find themselves one of 'them' and not 'us'  
for those who are forced into situations no-one would choose  
for those who experience the power of others as abuse and oppression.

Lord, we pray with pained hearts  
we acknowledge our complicity in the systems of power that wound  
and we seek the coming of Your kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray in the hope of Christ our King, who taught us to pray saying:  
Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.  
Amen.

## **Words of Sending**

Look at your hands, see the touch and the tenderness...

**...God's own for the world**

Look at your feet, see the path and the direction...

**...God's own for the world**

Look at your heart, see the fire and the love...

**...God's own for the world**

Look at the cross, see God's Son and our Saviour...

**...God's own for the world**

This is God's world

**and we will serve God in it.**

## **Blessing**

*May God Almighty be with you,  
The love of Christ our King be yours,  
and the peace of the Holy Spirit reign in your hearts.  
God bless you, now and evermore. Amen.*