

Part of this short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home by a local preacher in the Newport and Lower Wye Circuit. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people across the Methodist Connexion are sharing this act of worship with you.

You may wish to read Philippians 2:5-11 before praying the opening prayer.

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we acknowledge you as our Saviour and King, as we worship you this day help us to understand a little more of what that means, so that we may live our lives in fullness of joy and in a way that is pleasing to you. **Amen.**

Hymn: At the name of Jesus (Singing the Faith 317)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7w-tDjlpqk

At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed:

Bore it up triumphant

with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true;
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel (1817-1877)

Let us pray together:

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

Great God of love and truth, we celebrate the nature of your kingdom today. Your Son comes as King of kings and Lord of Lords, and brings in your kingdom around us and within us.

We praise you for the signs of your kingdom. Whenever justice and truth, love, joy and peace are found and shared, there your kingdom is!

We praise you for your unending love and mercy that shape your kingdom in our midst. We thank you for sending Jesus to teach us the way of the kingdom and to give strength to make us loyal followers of our living Lord.

Forgive us for the times when by our words, attitudes and actions we deny the kingdom's claim upon us.

Forgive us for failing to live as your kingdom people today.

Renew and restore us again, by your gentle power transforming us and the world around. Make us ready for your fullness as you hasten the day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord; to your eternal glory. Amen.

Readings

Revelation 1:4-8

⁴ John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

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

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! **Amen.**

⁷ “Look, he is coming with the clouds,”^[b]
and “every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him”;

and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”^[c]
So shall it 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.”

John 18:33-37

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

³⁴ “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

³⁶ Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

³⁷ “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

Time to Reflect

This, the Sunday before Advent has come to be known as the “Feast of Christ the King”. In the last week of this year’s lectionary, before we begin a new cycle in Advent, we come to the culmination of the flow of the narrative in the gospel. Christ is recognised and celebrated as King. Without this Sunday, as in the past, it was felt that the lectionary year reached a bit of an anti-climax: we travel through the readings with Jesus to Jerusalem – we grow in understanding as we re-read his teachings: and then we suddenly, in Advent are taken back to the wilderness: to people in darkness waiting for light, and before you know it we are with shepherds and wise men and it’s Christmas again.

So a moment to savour before all of that: Christ the King Sunday gives us the opportunity to celebrate the reign of Christ. And in that celebration of course, we use all the language associated with kingship as we reflect on Christ’s glory, his might, his power. The images, paintings and icons that show Christ as King tend to focus on this power and regal serenity and authority. The King is enthroned in his rightful place after the opposition and rejection by those who opposed his rule.

But what strikes us as odd and out of sync with all of that theological understanding today are the readings that are set for this feast of Christ the King. Their focus are on anything but the language of success, power and glory. John's account is taken from Good Friday, where a suffering and soon to be crucified man is on trial for his life. It seems entirely at odds with the images associated with Christ the King who is stately, in control. The fact that Jesus seems to ask as many questions of Pilate as vice versa adds to the complex nature of what's going on here.

Ultimately it is the powerless, crucified Christ that is to be read as the image that speaks most clearly about Kingship – at least Jesus' sort of Kingship - to us today. How strange this is! Let's not jump over the disconnect we feel out of familiarity. What is there for the condemned and soon to be crucified man other than to be buried? What sort of king has no robes of state, as the soldiers divide up his possessions? What sort of king is Jesus anyway?

The picture we are given today is of a man with no power, no authority, and no future. If this is a King, there is not much of a Kingdom left to speak of. Friends have dispersed and scattered. Family have already disowned him. The Kingmakers of the day, the lawyers and leaders have decreed that Jesus is a blasphemer and a threat to true religion. The authorities regard him as a nuisance and about as welcome as a mosquito – ripe to be crushed, destroyed for everyone's safety and best interests.

How does Kingship fit with all of this?

I suspect the clue is that God looks upon things in a rather different way than we do. Jesus' ministry up to this point has consistently refused the temptation of rabble rousing, stirring up the latent anger and disappointment of the people. He has consistently failed to feed into a sense of injustice and issue a call to arms. He has refused to divide people. Those things would have been as easy

to do then as they are for those who find themselves in power in 2021. Jesus sought to do only God's will. And doing that attracted all the wrong sorts of enemies. There is nothing more dangerous than someone who shows you the possibility of God: who reminds you that God does care how you shape your life. There is nothing more dangerous than sharing the truth of God.

God has different criteria for kings than we do. God has a different definition of power than we so often work with. God seems to shape the kingdom in different ways than we build our own empires, concerns, even churches.

In the Kingdom of God, truth is paramount. The truth about ourselves is to be told, alongside the truth of God's all conquering and never defeated love. In the Kingdom of God, it is "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" that reigns. In the Kingdom of God, already here and now us, God's will is done. In the Kingdom of God that is to come, the fullness of God's promised life is to be known and lived out.

On Christ the King Sunday, we celebrate our place in the Kingdom of God, the Alpha and Omega. We commit ourselves to seeking the Kingdom in our waiting, watching, praying and working. We find God reaching out with all we need to do the will of the King of Love.

A time of prayer

God of love, we turn to you in prayer:

In our prayers today we pray for all leaders and rulers of the nations. We pray for all who hold positions of power and influence in every sphere of our lives. May each one live out your justice and truth in their decision making and leading.

We pray too for all those who do not think of themselves as powerful, and for those the world is tempted to look down on. May each be strengthened by the true nature of your kingdom, where all find worth in your love.

We pray for a world in climate crisis, and for the response that is needed by all people to make the changes that are needed for all to thrive with all we have been given by God.

We pray for those we know who are hurting and unwell at this time. We pray for those who are lonely and those who are facing losses of all kinds. We lift those known to us to God.

We pray for ourselves, and for God's Church around the world. We give thanks for our shared belonging to one human family and to the Kingdom of God. Encourage our serving and our waiting and praying in these weeks ahead.

In the name of Christ our King.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn: What kind of love is this (Singing the Faith 286)

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTsfZnOIReo>

What kind of love is this
that gave itself for me?
I am the guilty one,
yet I go free.
What kind of love is this,
a love I've never known;
I didn't even know his name --
what kind of love is this?

What kind of man is this,
that died in agony?
He who had done no wrong
was crucified for me.
What kind of man is this,
who laid aside his throne
that I may know the love of God --
what kind of man is this?

By grace I have been saved;
it is the gift of God.
He destined me to be his own
such is his love.

No eye has ever seen,
no ear has ever heard,
nor has the human heart conceived
what kind of love is this?

Bryn Haworth and Sally Haworth
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A prayer of blessing

As we go into this next week may we know God's love,
strength, and guidance. **Amen.**

Original Materials by Yvette Edwards, Local Preacher in the Newport and
Lower Wye circuit.

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