



Reign of Christ

CALL TO WORSHIP

God was
In the beginning
Bringing wonder and light

God is
In the present
Bringing truth and love

God will be
In the future
Bringing hope and truth

Today and tomorrow
In time and eternity
Your Kingdom Come

In our world, in our streets
In our homes and communities
Your Kingdom Come

In our lives, in our loves
In our hopes and our travelling
Your Kingdom Come

HYMN: "REJOICE THE LORD IS KING" (TIS 216)

Rejoice, the Lord is King;
your Lord and King adore;
let all give thanks, and sing,
and triumph evermore;

*Lift up your heart, life up your voice.
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

Jesus the Saviour reigns,
the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains,
he took his seat above:

Lift up ...

His kingdom cannot fail,
he rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell
are to our Jesus given:

Lift up ...

He sits at God's right hand,
till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command,
and fall beneath his feet:

Lift up ...

Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the judge shall come,
and take his servants up
to their eternal home:

*We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
the trump of God shall sound, Rejoice!*

Charles Wesley. Public domain.

PRAYER

Gracious God,
your people hunger and thirst each day,
through lack of food, or lack of spiritual nourishment.
Open us to recognize the ways you reveal your grace,
your blessings, and your comforting presence.

You are our guide,
revealing the path on which we are to travel.
Help us to see your presence in one another,
and make us ready to act lovingly,
openly,
honestly,
and humbly
in the way of Christ. Amen.

We have some unfailing promises:
When we lose our way,
God searches for us until we are found.
When we hurt others,
God brings healing to all.
When we sin,
God forgives us.
Let us hold these promises close to our hearts,
and be open to God about things we try to hide.
Let us pray:

Generous God,
too often we find it easy to give material things
but hold back ourselves.
We stock the food pantries,
but brush aside those
who hunger for friendship.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We give our hand-me-downs away,
but overlook those whose hopes
have been stripped away.
Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We warmly greet those just like us,
but turn a deaf ear to
our neighbors who 'talk funny' or look different
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Forgive us, Gracious God,
Welcome us into your community of hope.
Amen

TS alt.

Assurance of Pardon and Renewal

Hear the Good News
The God who searches for the lost
and feeds the hungry
frees us from the prison of our ways.
In Christ Jesus, we are forgiven and made whole

Thanks be to God.

BIBLE READINGS

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Matthew 25:31-46

PRAYER

Gracious God, your love is timeless
Show us how to live every day
so that our lives may fit with your ways.
May the example of your faithful ones
around us and before us
inspire our hope and stir our hearts
so that we might serve you with wisdom and courage.
Amen

MESSAGE: "FOR THE LEAST OF THESE"

John Blanchard had been looking forward to this day for quite a while. Standing amongst the crowd at Grand Central Station (NY), he was searching amongst the faces for a girl whose heart he knew, but whose face he didn't. The girl who would be wearing a red rose.

His interest in her had begun 13 months before in a Florida library. He took a book off the shelf, and was intrigued not so much by the words of the book but with notes pencilled in margin. The jottings revealed a thoughtful mind and sensitive spirit. In the front of the book he discovered the previous owner's name; Hollis Maynell.

With considerable time and effort he located her address and found she lived in New York city. He wrote to introduce himself and invited her to correspond. The next day he was sent overseas for service in WW2. Over the next 13 months they grew to know each other through their letters. Blanchard requested a photo, but Miss Maynell refused. She said it shouldn't matter what she looked like. Eventually Blanchard returned home and they scheduled their first meeting; 7:00pm Grand Central Station, New York. He would recognise her by the red rose in her lapel.

As he stood on station platform a young, slim, elegant woman with flowing blonde hair came towards him. As she moved closer she said, "Going my way sailor?" Blanchard moved closer to her, then he saw Hollis Maynell. Standing nearby was a woman well past 40, with greying hair, and more than a little plump. The young girl was walking away; Blanchard felt torn: would he follow the attractive young woman or meet with the woman whose spirit he had shared.

He hesitated for a moment, then made his way toward the lady with the red rose in her lapel. He felt he would never love her; but they could have a precious friendship. He took a deep breath; "I'm Lt John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I'm so glad to meet you; may I take you to dinner?"

Woman's smile broadened as she said; "Look, I don't know what this about, but that young woman begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said if you were to ask me out to dinner that I should tell you she is waiting for you in the restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test."

While that story is fictional, first published in 1943, it's not difficult to understand its appeal or wisdom. The true nature of a person's heart is seen in its response to those considered unattractive. "Tell me whom you love and I will tell you who you are" said one writer.

It was not the first time however that a person's heart has been gauged by their concern for the undesirable. In the last sermon Jesus preaches in Matthew's gospel he does exactly that. That sermon is a graphic piece of literature describing the end, the final scene, the last judgement. It's a time when Christ separates the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the unrighteous; the compassionate from the cold-hearted.

And on what basis did Jesus make his selection? We may be surprised at the answer. The sheep and goats certainly were. To the sheep, the righteous, the compassionate people he said; *"I was hungry and you gave me food. Thirsty/ drink. Lonely/ welcomed me. No clothes/ something to wear. Sick and in prison/ visited me."* To the goats, the unrighteous, the cold-hearted people he said, *"I was hungry.. gave me nothing. Thirsty/ no drink; Lonely/ ignored me; No clothes/ left me naked; Sick and in prison/ neglected me"*

What showed the difference between the righteous and unrighteous? What was the sign that revealed the compassionate people? In Jesus' only description of the last judgement he asks, "Have you seen my image in the least of these brothers and sisters?" What shows the righteous has nothing to do with deep scholarship or the ability to amass huge crowds and speak or skilful literary talent or books that have been written; it is not what positions held in church organization or how long

you spend there. And it is nothing to do with doctrinal belief. One thing and one thing alone reveals where our heart really lies; have we seen and served Christ in the least of this world, the little ones? Have we lived compassionately towards them?

It isn't that those labelled goats were bad people. They weren't the evil of the society who commit sexual offences or steal or murder. It's just that they didn't do anything when they saw those in need.

It's ironic that neither the sheep or the goats saw Jesus in the needy and suffering. It's just that the sheep responded as Jesus would. They saw someone in need and they acted. They did so, not because these acts of compassion would earn them some reward. They did it because they saw love to others as the way to respond to God's amazing love.

And do you notice how simple the works are? Jesus is not asking an awful lot. He didn't say; I was sick and you healed me; I was in prison and you liberated me; I was lonely and you built a retirement home. No; only very simple things were required; no fanfare, no hoopla, no press clamouring for the story. Just simple acts of kindness, of noticing and acting.

The amazing thing is, and in the story the sheep are amazed, is that when we do good things for others, we are doing good things for Jesus.

There is a story of Francis of Assisi. Having turned his back on wealth; he endeavoured to live a simple life. One day he encountered a leper. He had an absolute fear of lepers, but on this occasion, rather than turn away embraced him. Francis then continued on his journey; but when looked back down the road, there was no one there. All his life Francis believed it was Jesus who had come to him.

You see this is the great secret of the Christian faith. That Jesus lives with and in the forgotten of this world; that Jesus resides with the needy; the Jesus is to be found amongst the broken and beaten people. Now we might experience the touch of Christ in worship or prayer or any number of ways; but we will never come really close to Jesus until we come close to where he is to be most fully found; in the poor, the neglected, the broken.

Mother Teresa and her sisters and brothers are well known for their work amongst the poor. She used to tell the sisters that when attending the poor they are attending Christ. After Mass one day she spoke to her nuns. "During Mass you saw how the priest touched the body of Christ with great love and tenderness. When you touch the poor today you will be touching the body of Christ; give them the same love and tenderness." Several hours later a young nun came all excited exclaiming "I have been touching the body of Christ for three hours." Mother Teresa asked what she meant. A man, discovered in a drain, had been brought in, covered with maggots. "I have been taking care of him. I have been touching Christ."

We find Christ in those the world has cast off; the homeless, the refugee, the criminal, the sick. Jesus says, the way you treat them is the way you treat me.

I find this a hard teaching of Jesus; I wish he hadn't said it. I wish he'd said the righteous are those who get up and speak about me. Or they are the ones who spend long hours working in the church. Or they are the ones who've read lots of books. But he didn't say that. He said the righteous are those who do good things for the little ones of this world. The message, it seems to me, is, how we act when we think God is not watching.

Jesus reminds us that the one who will see Christ is the one who sees the hurting person, the overlooked person, the little ones of this world. Do you want to see Jesus? Well, we actually can see Jesus every day. Jesus is to be seen when we;
visit a nursing home resident;

when we encounter a beggar on the street and don't cross to the other side;
when we spend time with an inmate;
when we listen to the pain of someone who spends their life alone;
when we don't brush off the person who is seriously ill, but sit with them in their pain.
This is where you will see Jesus.

Two months before his death in 1968, Martin Luther King Jr spoke to a congregation about how he would like to be remembered. He said, "If Christ is ruler of our lives, then my Nobel Prize is less important than my trying to feed the hungry. If Christ is King, then my invitations to the White House are less important than that I visited those in prison. If Christ is Lord, then my being TIME magazine's "Man of the Year" is less important than that I tried to love extravagantly, dangerously, with all my being."

When Jesus told the parable of the sheep and goats he set it at the end of time. I don't know how or when the world may end. I don't know how or when my life will end. All I know is what I am supposed to be and do now and that is to journey lovingly and compassionately with my companion travellers. For it is there that Christ the King still lives among his subjects, disguised as a pauper. It is there Christ the King, the merciful ruler comes to meet us in all our brokenness, and calls us to meet him in the needs of a broken and suffering world.

OFFERING PRAYER

God our Father, Christ our King,
you care for all your people.
As we bring our offerings and dedicate them to you
we pray they would relieve much suffering
of the people for whom you care deeply.
Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy Friend, help us to get real!
To get real with our faith and hope and love.

We bring our prayers to you for the hungry and the thirsty;
and for those aid agencies,
both Christian and secular,
who seek to relieve the suffering and
implement preventive programmes.
Holy Friend, help us to get real!
To get real with our faith and hope and love.

We bring our prayers to you for those
who are strangers and outsiders;
new people in town, new students in school,
new employees at our workplace,
newcomers to our church.
May they find the nurturing power of respect and acceptance.
Holy Friend, help us to get real!
To get real with our faith and hope and love.

We bring our prayers to you for the homeless and
ill clad people of the world;

boat people, street kids,
dispirited aboriginal communities, and
the deprived children of alcoholics, drug and gambling addicts.
May we find the most effective and ennobling
way to assist them to a better life.
Holy Friend, help us to get real!
To get real with our faith and hope and love.

We bring our prayers to you for all who are sick and suffering,
and for the care being given at home or in our hospitals,
or in the makeshift medical facilities in situations of warfare,
or in extremely poor countries.
Help us to share surgical skills and medications
across all countries and communities.
Holy Friend, help us to get real!
To get real with our faith and hope and love.

We bring to you our prayers for those in prison.
We think of the murderers and the embezzlers,
the rapists and the drug pushers,
the thieves and the con-men;
But also those mistakenly convicted and
those thousands who are prisoners of conscience.
We pray too for the prison officers, social workers, chaplains.
Holy Friend, help us to get real!
To get real with our faith and hope and love.

Holy Friend, without you we can do nothing.
With you we can achieve much more
than we can ever see or measure.
So give us the grace to thoughtfully and compassionately
play our small part in relieving the sufferings of the world.
Through Christ Jesus our Saviour,
who taught us to pray:

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and forever.
Amen*

(Prayer by Bruce Prewer)

HYMN: "SERVANT KING (TIS 256)

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.

Refrain

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

Refrain

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.

Refrain

© 1983 Thankyou Music. Admin by Integrity Music Pty Ltd. All rights reserved. Used by permission. CCL License No. 132915

BLESSING

Friends of God,
go into the new week
in the wise and courteous spirit of Jesus.
Be joyfully present to others
and listen for the voice of God within them.
Uphold them, befriend them,
and honour them.
In all things be open to the Spirit
who is our guide and light for the pathway.

May the Lord bless you and take care of you
may the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
may the Lord look on you with favour and give you peace.

BLESSING SONG: "MAY THE FEET OF GOD" (TIS 779)

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

Words © A Podlich
Used with permission. CCLI No 132915

FOR REFLECTION (Reflection questions are from Seasons of the Spirit)

- When have you felt you were invisible- as if no one cared you were present?
- When have you needed support and that need was both recognised and responded to?
- What difference did it make for you when your need was acknowledged and addressed?
- Who are the people today whose humanity becomes invisible?
- How do people respond differently when the humanity of 'the least of these' is seen?
- How might seeing 'the least of these' be risky? What challenges are posed in seeing?
- How would things change if we read this text as a judgment of nations more than individuals?

TO PONDER (from United Church of Christ)

Franklin D. Roosevelt, 20th century

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

Kalu Ndukwe Kalu, 20th century

"The things you do for yourself are gone when you are gone, but the things you do for others remain as your legacy."

Marilynne Robinson, 21st century, When I Was a Child I Read Books

"Say that we are a puff of warm breath in a very cold universe. By this kind of reckoning we are either immeasurably insignificant or we are incalculably precious and interesting. I tend toward the second view."

Verna J. Dozier, The Dream of God: A Call to Return, 20th century

"The important question to ask is not, 'What do you believe?' but 'What difference does it make that you believe?' Does the world come nearer to the dream of God because of what you believe?"

Teilhard de Chardin, 20th century

"I think that the world will not be converted to the heavenly hope of Christianity if first Christianity does not convert itself to the hope of the world."