Printed Service -Sunday, 22nd November 2026
Prepared by William Glasse
The Reign of Christ



Call to Worship - Psalm 95 (Responsively) O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Hymn - STF319 - Christ triumphant, ever reigning
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPXSILECWm0

Christ triumphant ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
hear us as we sing:
Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name.

Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
power and majesty concealing
by your humble birth *Yours the glory…*

Suffering servant, scorned, ill–treated,
victim crucified!
death is through the cross defeated,
sinners justified *Yours the glory…*

Priestly king, enthroned for ever
high in heaven above!
sin and death and hell shall never
stifle hymns of love *Yours the glory…*

So, our hearts and voices raising
through the ages long,
ceaselessly upon you gazing,
this shall be our song *Yours the glory…*

Prayer of approach : We continue with Psalm 95 as we praise and reflect.

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways.' Therefore in my anger I swore, 'They shall not enter my rest.'

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon
Lord, we hear your words, your judgement, And we know that you are just. We understand, from the gospels and the teaching of Jesus, That your mercy is unfathomable.

We confess again our sins, and pray, We turn to you in faith remembering the words, Unjustifiably but humbly repenting and saying. 'Lord forgive us.'

We have bullied and cajoled each other; We have ignored people in need and worried about ourselves. We have blotted out your voice and, So nearly, lost your invitation to the kingdom banquet.

So here we are, praying we are not too late, Turning in thanksgiving for the knowledge of your steadfastness,
Recalling all we have been taught; 'Father, forgive us. For we know not what we do'.

In the name of our risen Christ we believe we are forgiven. We pray for courage to look up, and away from the swamp of sin Into the light of your presence, our eternal hope, Crucified Lord and Risen Saviour.

May we believe the miracle of Grace; Our sins are forgiven in Jesus's name.
Amen.

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, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction to theme - The Reign of Christ

Today is the final Sunday of the Liturgical Year as we mark it in our tradition. The theme is celebratory as we look back over the great moments in the year, but we share readings that pull us up short if we risk complacency.

Are we those who jostle and push to take all the benefits for ourselves?

Are we those who ignore need in our midst and so lose sight of the Christ amongst us?

Who is it, today, who is thin and frightened, overlooked and cold? Have we seen them; are they nothing, or are they our friends or the face in our mirror…

Hymn - STF479 - The King of Love my shepherd is https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWfZ-8s71-k

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me

4In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

Reading - Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24 - God the True Shepherd

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

Reading - Matthew 25: 31-46 - The Judgement of the Nations

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 3And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”

And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”

Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

Hymn - STF672 - Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOamiaW0b6E

Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We want to serve you, to answer your call.
Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?
What should we do in our service to all?

‘Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;
go where the farmlands are empty and bare.
I broke the bread for the people around me;
out of my plenty, think what you can share.

‘Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;
go where my people sleep out in the rain.
I had no comforts but what others gave me;
offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.

‘Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;
go where my sheep are rejected and lost.
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;
go and do likewise, and don’t count the cost.’

Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We are your servants who answer your call.
You go before us, and there we will follow,
taking our cross in the service of all.

Sermon - Thin and frightened

What is starvation

Like most children, I remember what it felt like to be hungry. I also remember what happened when I described that feeling as starvation. My mother would quickly point out that I was a long way from starving. If I looked at the news, she said, I would see children who had no food at all, and whose lives were in danger.

It was a stark lesson, but it made its mark. I have always been wary of using that word too freely. My hunger was real, but it was not the same as having nothing to eat and no prospect of a meal.

Definitions of bullying and greed

We are familiar with the idea of people bullying and jostling to obtain far more than they need. Greed is a human failing, and it takes many forms. Sometimes it is about possessions. Sometimes it is about power, influence or the conviction that our own wishes matter more than anyone else’s.

Food is not the only area in which this is manifest. I read a story recently that told of a civil servant who held down five jobs simultaneously. Questions of management miss the point that this is a pointed example of pure greed.

Bullying is what happens when strength is used to push someone else aside. Greed is what happens when having enough is no longer enough. Together, they can make life very hard for those who have less opportunity to make themselves heard.

We can become very caught up in arguments about benefits, rights and entitlements. These are complicated matters. But my mother's lesson still challenges me: we must not exaggerate our own need or importance until the needs of other people disappear from view.

Readings in overview

Our readings from Ezekiel and Matthew give us different viewpoints over a similar scene. Both use the familiar picture of sheep, shepherding and the separation of animals. But they ask us to look at different things.

In Ezekiel, God sees the strong animals pushing the weak aside. The flock belongs to God, but some sheep are making life miserable for others. God promises to seek the lost, strengthen the weak and judge between sheep and sheep. Those who have been scattered by bullying will not be forgotten.

In Matthew, Jesus describes the judgement of the nations. Here the distinction becomes visible through what people have done, or failed to do, for those in need. One reading exposes the harm caused by selfishness. The other reveals the significance of practical kindness.

How we live now – Scattered

We live among people of many convictions, not in a separate enclosure marked out for Christians. To borrow the picture Jesus uses, sheep and goats roam together. The question of identity is not always straightforward.

Many Christians wonder how openly to speak about their faith. When is it helpful witness, and when might it put someone off? Sometimes we can feel like those thin and frightened animals, keeping to the edges for fear of being ridiculed or ignored.

Think of sheep grazing on common land. Looking across a wide stretch of countryside, we might assume that they all belong to one farmer. Yet there may be several owners, each able to identify their own animals and gather them from the larger flock.

So, what identifies us as belonging to Christ?

Hallmarks of ownership

Ezekiel reminds us that God knows the sheep who have been pushed aside. Their weakness does not make them invisible to their shepherd. But neither is weakness itself a badge of faith. God's concern is with how the sheep treat one another.

In Matthew, those welcomed by the King are surprised. They have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger and cared for the sick without recognising Christ in those they helped. They were not calculating what service to God might earn them. They responded to need and discovered that Christ had been served.

Here is a hallmark of belonging: being a person of principle who does the right thing, even when there is no recognition or reward. That does not mean cowering in the background.
And it certainly does not mean barging everyone else out of the way. It means noticing people and responding with care.

Summary – Healthy growth

Healthy growth needs nourishment suited to the life we lead. I remember the school lunch queue, where we probably ate much the same, although some of us spent our time playing sport while others avoided physical activity whenever

possible. I belonged rather more to that second group! But physical appearance does not tell us who is receiving healthy spiritual food.

Healthy spiritual nourishment sharpens our judgement. It helps us do the right thing, at the right time, in the right way. It teaches us to distinguish what we need from what we merely want, and to see beyond ourselves to the person beside us.

We may still feel thin and frightened sometimes. Faith does not require us to pretend otherwise. But belonging to Christ gives us a reason not to hide, and never a reason to bully. The shepherd knows us. The hungry, the stranger and the overlooked are before us. The question is whether the nourishment we receive becomes kindness in the lives we lead.

The Christ who will reign over all things is the Christ who gave away his own life for the sake others – not thin and frightened but tortured and beaten he died; except he rose again and in his resurrection power he becomes the Good Shepherd who knows all his sheep – our Shepherd and our King!

Amen.

Hymn - STF693 - Beauty for brokenness https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08utbDFP9AE

Beauty for brokenness,
hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world
this is our prayer.
Bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset,
your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for the craftsmen,
trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause
of those who can't speak:

God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray;
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain;
come, change our love
from a spark to a flame.

Refuge from cruel wars,
havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary,
freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields,
scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness,
his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned -
our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed;
make us content with
the things that we need.

Lighten our darkness,
breathe on this flame
until your justice burns
brightly again;
until the nations
learn of your ways,
seek your salvation
and bring you their praise.

Dedication of Offering : God, as we thank you for all we have, As we repent of what we have taken, We rejoice that we are free to give. May all we offer, Cash, time, energy, Further the work of your kingdom. In all things may glory accrue to you, Generous God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession : A prayer that we may care for others

Holy One – far beyond our imaginings, yet coming to meet us through Jesus – in the joy and messiness, the hopefulness and the hardships of our lives. May our places of worship be safe and authentic spaces for sharing who we are and how we are as we journey alongside one another and with you. May we listen attentively and compassionately, as we seek one another's well-being and flourishing, knowing that all are cherished by you. Amen.

Prayers for our communities and families and ourselves

We have reflected on the lives we lead and the society that surrounds us. We are part of lifestyles and systems that may seem hard to change; we meet people whose circumstances vary from ours in many ways. Sometimes we feel hard done by and put down while at other times our privilege and good fortune seem overwhelming.

Let us pray for people who have little; those who will be hungry tonight or who will have no one to care whether they are well or ill.

Let us keep silence and visualise the people we know.

Let us consider those who have great wealth, good health, and revel in popularity. May they be responsible, aware and generous people. Help us to see where our faith may make us part of their number when we count blessings and not pounds in the bank or contacts on our phones.

Let us keep silence and reflect.

We who have families rejoice in the blessings of ties of kinship and the love and support that are there. We who are accepted by a church give thanks for the wondrous variety of the family of the people of faith.

Let us keep silence and think of those embittered by estrangement.

We who are unencumbered by responsibilities in the world pray for those balancing great burdens of care.

Let us keep silence and remember to be careful what we wish for.

And now let us pray for peace among the wider community of nations. We think especially of the places continually in the news like Ukraine and Iran. But we remember too those who may easily drop out of view but whose needs do not fall away, like Sudan or Myanmar.

We pray for those living with the scourge of disease, especially Ebola, but also those who still suffer badly from COVID and other more routine winter illnesses.

We also think of those who are at the end of their lives, some in peace and some in pain.
We pray for those who watch with them and for those who will die alone.
We hold in our hearts all grieving the loss of someone close to them and ask that they may be strengthened.

Let us keep silence and watch with them all.

Lord God, Eternal One, we bring these prayers to you for the sake of Jesus who died for us and empowered the Spirit that fills us in Jesus's name. Amen.

Hymn - STF185 - Sing we the King who is coming to reign https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvaoxZkDlcY&t=3s

Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
joy to the nations when Jesus is King:
Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.

All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
doubt shall not darken his witness within;
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
love is victorious when Jesus is King.

Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song your creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King

Benediction : Discipline our energies, O God, to your purposes; school our tongues to your praise and soften our hearts to your wisdom. May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon us and remain with us now and for evermore. Amen.