

prepared by Rev Ruth Lownsborough

Welcome to this act of worship. Take comfort that although you may be on your own, you are part of God's church, worshipping God together with others at this time.

Call to worship Psalm 46: 1-2, 6-7, 10-11

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.

The nations are in uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

'Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth'.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Hymn StF 317 At the name of Jesus

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.

Adoration of Jesus as Christ the King

Almighty and merciful God, may heaven and earth proclaim your glory and never stop praising you.

For in your Son Jesus Christ, the King of the universe, you break the power of evil and make all things new.

We praise you that Jesus was willing to give up all the splendour and glory of heaven, to take on the garb of humanity and come to live as one of us; to reign as king but a king of quite a different sort.....a king whose life was lived in humility and servanthood and whose crown was one of suffering.

Loving God of all, we have come today to spend time in your presence....whatever state we're in, please meet us in our need....transform & shape us by your love.

Your love for us is so wonderful, steadfast and true, and even though we falter and waver in our love for you, your love for us never diminishes.

Thank you that you are our shepherd who loves and cares for his flock even when we wander away.

Help us always to listen for your voice and to follow where you lead. Help us in our weakness to trust in the power of your love & forgiveness, so that we may reflect the same kind of love to others.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Reading: 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." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Reflection

The Roman authorities and religious leaders did everything they could to discredit and publicly shame Jesus, who as a good shepherd, had drawn the crowds to himself. In naked crucifixion alongside known criminals, Jesus is stripped of everything.....except his love for his Father and all humanity.

What kind of king is this?

One who pours out forgiveness on those who kill him, 'Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.'

One who listens and responds to the penitent, dying plea of a criminal. 'Today you will be with me in paradise'.

One who goes on loving both his Father and his neighbour, right to the end.

The soldiers and religious leaders mocked Jesus as a ridiculous parody of a king. To them Jesus was weak, powerless, a shameful failure and they wanted the crowds to go on rejecting Jesus even in death. They wanted the sheep to be scattered far from the shepherd.

BUT Jesus is not the kind of king who puts himself and his own needs at the top of the list; he demonstrated that in the temptations in the desert at the beginning of his ministry. Jesus, in his need, turns to God, his Father, in trust and obedience and for inner strength to endure.

This is a king who was born to serve, born to live and die and rise to new life in the power of God, demonstrated not in strength, domination and might, but in mercy, forgiveness and love.

It was the depth of Jesus' complete love, reaching out, that held Jesus to the cross.

It was the sacrifice of his life and his resurrection which has overcome the forces of sin and death for ever and makes possible our reconciliation with God.

The notice on the cross 'This is the King of the Jews', designed to mock, instead declares the profound truth about Jesus. This King's divine glory shines out most brightly in the moment of most agonising weakness and the cross becomes the throne of grace for us, a place where we can take the burden of our brokenness and be made whole in the outpouring of Jesus' love, mercy and forgiveness.

The criminal who asked Jesus to remember him, and the Roman centurion who kept watch at the crucifixion both recognised something of God in Jesus. They were drawn to him.

Jesus has been drawing people to himself ever since then, through the witness of others, the power of the Spirit, words of scripture and personal encounter.

Jesus invites us every day to receive him as king of our lives, that he might pour out his forgiveness and grace, and enable us, through the guiding presence of his Holy Spirit to follow him day by day. Amen

As a personal response, spend some time in quiet reflection on what it means to you, to receive Jesus as King of your life.

Prayer of confession

Lord, forgive us, when we have neglected to acknowledge or profess your importance in our lives. Forgive us when we have prioritised the trivial, when we have enthroned other things in our hearts. Restore our focus on you; help us begin again. Reclaim us and redeem us, God of everything, embedding in us a longing for your kingdom and a sense of your majesty. Amen.

Hymn StF 249 Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love

Refrain

*Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,
show us how to serve
the neighbours we have from you*

1 Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.

2 Neighbours are rich folk and poor,
neighbours are black, brown, and white,
neighbours are nearby and far away.

3 These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love;
all these are neighbours to us and you.

4 Kneel at the feet of our friends,
silently washing their feet:
this is the way we should live with you.

Prayers of intercession

O God, where voices proclaim other kings and other lords, re-establish your reign;
where tyrants and dictators oppress the poor and the hungry,
topple their thrones and rescue the oppressed.

O God, where so-called prophets and priests abuse their influence,
expose their deeds of darkness with your awesome light;
bring your justice to reign and may a new integrity be born in places of authority.

O God, where your name has been forgotten, where mere lip service remains,
where your people have neglected or misunderstood their purpose,
make yourself known as king, and with tender mercy, restore those hanging on by a thread.

O God, where people cry out for justice, compassion and freedom, may their voices be heard and actions taken so that your kingdom will grow and all will be valued and welcomed.

In a moment of quiet, lift up to God those known to you who are in need of God's loving presence....

O God, in our lives here today, reveal your heart to us, remind us of your might and of your mercy, you who shepherd us with love and grace.

Create in us a kingdom that will change this world. In the name of Christ the King,

Amen.

Hymn StF 479 The King of love my shepherd is

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.

In 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.

Blessing & sending

Jesus, you are our true king, our Lord and Saviour.
Equip us by your Spirit to live lives full of praise and service to you.

And may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us always.

Amen.