

# CIRCUIT VIRTUAL SERVICE 22<sup>nd</sup> November

June Hardcastle

Last Sunday before Advent. Lectionary theme: Christ the King.

**Call to Worship.** from Philippians 2 verse 9

God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed upon Him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Hymn** At the name of Jesus SthF 317 Hymns and Psalms 74

<https://youtu.be/OI2rKRCWmOU>

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| <p>1 At the name of Jesus<br/>every knee shall bow,<br/>every tongue confess him<br/>King of Glory now.<br/>'Tis the Father's pleasure<br/>we should call him Lord,<br/>who from the beginning<br/>was the mighty Word.</p> <p>2 Humbled for a season,<br/>to receive a name<br/>from the lips of sinners<br/>unto whom he came,<br/>faithfully he bore it<br/>spotless to the last,<br/>brought it back victorious<br/>when from death he passed :</p> <p>3 Bore it up triumphant<br/>with its human light,<br/>through all ranks of creatures<br/>to the central height,<br/>to the throne of Godhead,<br/>to the Father's breast ;<br/>filled it with the glory<br/>of that perfect rest.</p> | <p>4 In your hearts enthrone him ;<br/>there let him subdue<br/>all that is not holy,<br/>all that is not true ;<br/>crown him as your captain<br/>in temptation's hour :<br/>let his will enfold you<br/>in its light and power.</p> <p>5 For this same Lord Jesus<br/>shall return again,<br/>with his Father's glory,<br/>with his angel train ;<br/>all the wreaths of empire<br/>meet upon his brow,<br/>and our hearts confess him<br/>King of Glory now.</p> |
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Caroline Maria Noel (1817–1877)

## Prayer

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we praise you for the Good News you have proclaimed for people everywhere through the life, death, resurrection and kingly glory of your Son, Jesus. In Him the humble poor are exalted, and the wounds of the broken hearted are bound up. In Him, the power of evil is overcome, setting captives free. We praise you for our share in the victory that Jesus won for us. We say boldly that Jesus is Lord and King. Amen

## Bible Reading

Part of the lectionary Epistle reading: Ephesians 1

<sup>17</sup>I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup>and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup>he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

**Hymn** either King of Kings, Majesty SthF 331 <https://youtu.be/HGnpyqW08k>

OR Ye Servants of God Hymns and Psalms 278 [https://youtu.be/wZ9j3e8\\_yQc](https://youtu.be/wZ9j3e8_yQc)

1 King of kings, majesty,  
God of heaven living in me.  
Gentle Saviour, closest Friend,  
Strong Deliverer, Beginning and End,  
all within me falls at your throne.

*Your majesty, I can but bow ;  
I lay my all before you now.  
In royal robes I don't deserve,  
I live to serve your majesty.*

2 Earth and heaven worship you,  
Love eternal, faithful and true,  
who bought the nations, ransomed  
souls,  
brought this sinner near to your  
throne ;  
all within me cries out in praise.

*Your majesty, I can but bow ;  
I lay my all before you now.  
In royal robes I don't deserve,  
I live to serve your majesty,  
I live to serve your majesty.*

Jarrood Cooper

**Prayer** which is adapted from the Book of Common Prayer.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we give you most humble and hearty thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we ask you, give us that due sense of all your mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days. Amen

**Bible Reading**

Lectionary Gospel reading Matthew chapter 25 verses 31 to 46

## **The Sheep and the Goats**

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

<sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

<sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

<sup>44</sup> “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

<sup>45</sup> “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

<sup>46</sup> “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

**To repent is not to look only downwards at our own shortcomings, but also upwards to God’s love. It is not just to look backwards with self-reproach but also forward with trustfulness. It is not just to see what we have failed to be, but to rejoice in what by the grace of God we might yet become.**

**Prayer** of confession, some of it adapted from the Covenant Service

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we hear the words of your Son who we have proclaimed as our King, and we confess that we have not always been the sheep of your pasture. You have set forth the way of life for us in Him and yet we confess our slowness to learn of Him and from Him, our failures in following, and our reluctance to bear the cross in the service of others. Thank you for the words of Jesus that anyone coming to Him, he will not turn away. So we thank you for your forgiveness and ask you to send your Holy Spirit with a fresh anointing upon us that we may live our lives in holiness and in righteousness.

We offer anew our time and our talents and our money and we give them in stewardship, in love and with generosity. Amen

### **Sermon**

I was for three years the Branch Organiser for the Mother's Union at St Luke's and St Bart's when Nigel was their vicar. Father Brian was a retired priest who had been there for many many years and he was the Mothers Union Chaplain. He came to most meetings and 4 times a year would celebrate Communion for the devotions part of the meeting. He was a lovely lovely man. He was also a stickler for the lectionary so would only use whatever the Gospel reading for the day was. He would not change it. On a particular occasion it was the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree. Jesus makes it wither from the roots, never to yield fruit again. I am always taken aback by this story; this seems stunningly out of character for Jesus, the child-welcomer, compassionate healer, and storm-calmer. BUT I duly read the passage as I always did on those occasions but was rather in trouble with Fr Brian afterwards as I ended the reading **not** by saying This is the Gospel of the Lord but by saying

This is the (very difficult) Gospel of the Lord.

Today on the feast day of Christ the King, we have another difficult Gospel passage. I guess that the vast majority of us are familiar with it. But our familiarity tends to home in on the When I needed a neighbour were you there aspect. I know we are generous with our money giving and with our time and practical action which comes out of a bedrock of compassion for those in need. For we know that in so much as we have done to the very least, we have done it to Jesus Himself.

But this story has its darker aspects and it is those we are going to look at.

Jesus is there as King. He has come in glory. And He has come to judge.

And two things are going to happen to those who have not helped the hungry or the thirsty or the stranger or those needing clothes or the sick or the imprisoned. The first, says Jesus, is going into the fire prepared for them.

NOW let's have a think. There are two places in the Bible that are 'stand out' stories about fire.

The first, in the Old Testament. Moses is going about his shepherd duties and he sees a bush on fire, but the bush is not consumed. There are the flames but the bush is not burnt.

Moses goes up to this strange sight and God speaks to him from the bush, from the flames.

God is THERE and God says it is holy ground and that His name is I AM

I AM – so not a vengeful deity intend on inflicting pain without end, but I AM ... and we know from Jesus who that I AM is:

I AM the Bread of Life, I AM the light of the world, I AM the door, I AM the good shepherd, I AM the resurrection and the life, I AM the vine, I AM the way, the truth and the life.

The second 'stand out story about fire': the day of Pentecost. The disciples had experienced the strange phenomenon of what looked like tongues ( flames) of fire which separated and came to rest on each of them. And we know the story from there – they were emboldened, they were given words to say to speak to others about Jesus. In the course of time they experienced much giftedness from the Holy Spirit and in their lives there were yes many mistakes and things gone wrong but the fruits came to being as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control.

NOW imagine having spent your life rejecting the way of following Jesus and then you meet Jesus the King and he sends you into those flames where you see with the greatest clarity the life you could have had with following the I AM. And to see in those flames the giftedness, the fruits of the Spirit which could have enriched your life and others

Not an invitation – oh would you look to see what it could have been like. No, you are ordered into it.

The passage says that the devil and his angels are there- and so you see the contrast – the sheer grossness and purposelessness of that other way.

Jesus goes on to talk about being cast into darkness – IMAGINE- to have been surrounded by the fire of the passionate I AM and by the flames of the Holy Spirit who the Nicene Creed describes as the Lord, the Giver of Life, and to see with utter clarity what could have been. Then into the dark.

### **What greater darkness can there be than to know that you were the one who didn't switch on the light?**

Jesus confronts us with reality. Whose side are you on when matters of justice, equality and sheer human need are all around us?

I have a little story to tell you.

It was the second week in September 2002 and I was the teacher on playground duty. I was keeping a particular eye out for the new Reception children and out of the corner of my eye I saw one of them disappearing into the bushes on the perimeter of the playground. I hastened over there and called out

"Luke, please come out from inside the bushes."

Very quickly, the small, bedraggled boy appeared.

"Luke, good boy for coming out so quickly but what was you doing in there?"

"Mrs Hardcastle, I was looking for goblins."

"Luke, there are no goblins in the bushes."

The small boy who had so quickly acceded to my authority as the teacher on playground duty and come immediately out of the bushes, now squared up to me and said in a rather argumentative tone of voice

“Mrs Hardcastle, have you been there?”

We gather today as Methodists. We hold fast to the Methodist Quadrilateral – we have taken seriously this difficult passage of **Scripture**. If we move to another aspect of the Quadrilateral, we stand in the **tradition** of John Wesley. He said ‘There is no holiness but social holiness’ by which he meant we cannot be Christians in piety alone which was why he directed people to the weekly class meeting where they shared what they were doing with their lives and were held accountable for their actions and lack of them, including their money. We add to that the other two aspects of the quadrilateral – **reason** and **experience** and those two wrap around and interact with that Scripture and that Tradition to lead us to examine and act upon the economics, the inequalities, the political implications of the words of Jesus.

Whatever you did not do for the least of these, you did not do for me.

I am pretty sure that 4 year old Luke, however hard he looked, never found goblins. But it is an inescapable fact that when we encounter the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisoner we will find Jesus there, for as he said

In so much as you have done it to the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me.

So in the words of Luke the 4 year old, have you been there? And if not, will you go?

**Hymn** When I needed a neighbour StHF 256 <https://youtu.be/fExR7eOhJ00>

OR The church of Christ in every age Hymns and Psalms 804  
[https://youtu.be/wUvPH\\_gy1c](https://youtu.be/wUvPH_gy1c)

1 When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there ?

When I needed a neighbour, were you there ?

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
were you there ?*

2 I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there ?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there ?

3 I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there ?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there ?

4 When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there ?

When I needed a shelter, were you there ?

5 When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there ?

When I needed a healer, were you there ?

6 Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there,

wherever you travel I'll be there.

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
I'll be there.*

Sydney Carter (1915–2004)

## Prayers of intercession

**Almighty God, Father of all mercies, throughout all of human history your desire to abide with us and to create places of meeting has never wavered. Therefore with hope and with confidence we bring our prayers before you.**

**Proclaiming Jesus as King and with the help of your Holy Spirit, we ask that we may be so rooted and grafted in you, that we bear fruit to your glory. Nourish and tend your church that we may be strong and fit to serve this present age. Help us in our moral and political dilemmas and the challenges we face at this time.**

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

**Proclaiming Jesus as King and with the help of your Holy Spirit, we ask that the rulers and governments of people produce the wine of justice. We ask you to raise up leaders who will promote conditions where all may flourish, defending the poor and the weak, the vulnerable and those easily overlooked.**

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Proclaiming Jesus as King and with the help of your Holy Spirit, we are confident that you prepare the fruits of the Spirit to enrich individual lives and whole communities. We pray for those who are struggling for survival, those whose lives have collapsed around them, those who have been stripped of their dignity, those who have lost hope.**

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Proclaiming Jesus as King and with the help of your Holy Spirit, with confidence we pray for those whose health has failed and who long for the nourishment of healing.**

**In a time of quiet we remember those others who are on our hearts and minds**

***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

**Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we know that at the end we shall see you face to face in all your glory.**

**In a time of quiet we remember before you those who we have loved and who have gone before us to that place where countless angels dwell and where there is no more sorrow and no more pain and where they have heard the words of King Jesus “ Come, blessed of my Father and receive the Kingdom prepared for you.**

**We gather up all our prayers in the words that Jesus taught us.**

**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.

**Closing hymn** Praise my soul the king of heaven StF 83 Hymns and Psalms 13

<https://youtu.be/i3dHeRB2c3g>

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| <p>1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven ;<br/>to his feet thy tribute bring.<br/>Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,<br/>who like thee his praise should sing ?<br/>Praise him ! Praise him !<br/>Praise the everlasting King !</p> <p>2 Praise him for his grace and favour<br/>to his people in distress ;<br/>praise him, still the same for ever,<br/>slow to chide, and swift to bless.<br/>Praise him ! Praise him !<br/>Glorious in his faithfulness.</p> | <p>3 Father-like, he tends and spares us ;<br/>well our feeble frame he knows ;<br/>in his hands he gently bears us,<br/>rescues us from all our foes.<br/>Praise him ! Praise him !<br/>Widely as his mercy flows.</p> <p>4 Angels in the height, adore him ;<br/>ye behold him face to face ;<br/>sun and moon, bow down before him,<br/>dwellers all in time and space.<br/>Praise him ! Praise him !<br/>Praise with us the God of grace !</p> |
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Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)

A Franciscan Blessing:

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people and the earth, so that you may work for justice, freedom and care for the resources of this planet.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer inequality, rejection, war and hunger, so that you may reach out to comfort and turn their pain to joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you will do what others claim cannot be done and thus bring justice and kindness to the poor.

AND

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen