

Written Service Sunday November 19th 2023
A service of worship for use at home
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Charity number
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Welcome and Introduction

Today is the last Sunday in the church and is also known as the Feast of Christ the King.

Call to worship

And so as we gather together on the Feast of Christ the King we are called to worship and we pray,
Come and worship the Lord Jesus,
King of Kings, yet servant of all.
Come with your dreams, your longings, your hopes, and all those on your hearts today, to seek blessing and healing.
Amen

Prayers of adoration - Psalm 95 v 1 – 7a (The Message)

¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
² Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
³ For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
⁷ for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Hymn – StF 185 Sing we the King - So we sing of the King who is coming to reign

Sing we the King who is coming to reign,
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain;
Righteousness, peace then 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 men shall dwell in His marvelous light,
Races long severed His love shall unite,
Justice and truth from His scepter shall spring,
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King.
Come let us sing ...

All shall be well in His kingdom of peace,
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase,
Foe shall be friend when His triumph we sing,
Sword shall be sickle when Jesus is King.
Come let us sing ...

Knowledge and fear of the Lord then shall be
As the deep waters that cover the sea;
All things shall be in the splendour of spring
And all harmonious when Jesus is King.
Come let us sing ...

Kingdom of Christ, for thy coming we pray,
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song Thy creation shall sing,
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.
Come let us sing ...

Reading – Matthew 25 v 35 - 45

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, 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.'

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

“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.’ ... For I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink, 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.’

“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?’ “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.’

Spend a few moments reflecting on this reading. How does it make you feel?

Prayer of Confession

Christ our King,
our eyes have not noticed the lonely;
our hands have not fed the hungry;
our voice has not spoken words of comfort
to those thirsting for reassurance;
our feet have not taken us to prison cells;
our heart has not been broken by the pain of
others.

Lord, we have been blinkered, indifferent,
silent, selfish.

Forgive us, and bless us with the courage
to go where we do not always want to go;
with love to share with those
we would not choose to visit;
and make each of us a sheep fit for your fold,
forgiven and redeemed.

Amen.



Jesus our Saviour,
we rejoice that you are a king of compassion,
not cruelty;
of peace, not power;
of grace, not greed;
of humility, not hatred;
of warmth, not war;
of justice, not jealousy;
of passion, not power;
and that your kingdom is open to all, even to
us.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, King of all kings.

Thank you.

From Roots 2014

Hymn – When I needed a neighbour were you there?

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?

I was hungry and thirsty
Were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?
And the creed ...

I was cold, I was naked
Were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
And the creed ...

When I needed a shelter
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter were you there?
And the creed ...

When I needed a healer
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there?
And the creed ...

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

The Word

So we've thought about today being the feast of Christ the King, but this Sunday, the last Sunday of the Christian year is also known by another name - Stir up Sunday.

Stir up Sunday is thought to have got its name from the collect for today which begins "Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people".

It is said that as the congregation heard those words - "Stir up, O Lord," they were reminded that they ought to be getting on with making the Christmas Puddings and so the name "Stir up Sunday" was born.

But it has struck me that we could name the whole of Jesus' ministry as a "Stir up ministry". If we look back so much of his ministry could be said to have stirred up the traditions, the recognised practices, the engrained laws, the culture of his time.

As he called the fishermen to leave their boats and go fishing for men he would have stirred up their lives; He visited and ate with tax collectors; He spoke with the Samaritan women at the well; he touched and healed lepers; He allowed women to sit at his feet and learn; He healed a Roman Centurion's son; He sent his disciples out to heal and drive out demons; And that's before we even start on Jesus challenging the authorities, challenging the Jewish laws, even proclaiming to be the Messiah! He stirred things up in all sorts of ways.

So here we are at this very familiar reading with that list of 6 actions –

- you fed me,
- you gave me water,
- you took me in,
- you clothed me,
- I was sick and you looked after me,
- you visited me when I was in prison.

The disciples picked up on one tiny word "**me**"

"Lord When did we do any of these things for you?" and then comes a bit of stirring.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did it for me".

When the disciples had acted in this way Jesus told it was as if they are acting directly, personally to Jesus. Can you imagine how that must have made them feel? They had actually been ministering to their master, their Lord, the Christ as Jesus has been trying to explain to them.

What feelings did that stir up in them?

But then comes the other side of the coin.

- You gave me nothing to eat,
- you gave me nothing to drink,
- you did not invite me in,
- you did not clothe me,
- you did not visit me,
- you did not care for me.

Again that tiny word "**me**".

"Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison?" "I tell I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me."

Jesus is really stirring now isn't he, it's as if he's got the biggest wooden spoon he can find – when you didn't do it for the least of these, you did not do it for me, you left me, you ignored me, you turned your back on me – your master, your friend, your Lord, the Christ!!

The Message puts it like this ...

“Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’”

We live in a world where so many are “overlooked or ignored,” We live in a world which really needs stirring up is lots of ways. How often have I failed to even see the needs of the people around me let alone done anything about it. And therefore if we follow our argument through, how often have I failed to see Jesus, or ignored him by lack of action.

Prayers for others

So we are going to look at those people Jesus mentioned and spend and then I invite you to spend a few moments reflecting and bring your own prayers for others.

You fed me and gave me water

We see pictures on our TV screens of those in areas of the world struck down by famine, failure of crops through climate change; those in worn torn areas where even the basics are in short supply, where there is no guarantee of aid coming in. Closer to home we those who are worried about the cost of living How can we stir things up.

We can respond to appeals on our televisions for those in struck down by famine, we can support charities like water aid and we can twin our toilets support the work of our local foodbank.

But do we take a warm drink to the man, woman or teenager covered in newspapers for warmth, do we see where there is a soup kitchen.

We see those hungry for love. Let’s stir it up and offer a smile, a friendly word in the supermarket queue or the bus queue. Could we invite someone to a coffee morning or craft club or to service.



SILENCE

I was hungry and thirsty – Were you there?

I was sick and you looked after me

Jesus talks about the sick and that is also fairly self-explanatory. We can’t all be doctors and nurses, but there are things we can do. And maybe the stirring of our thinking in 2023 is not just thinking about the ill themselves, but about the carers. Many people today are faced with caring for loved ones at home and there are all sorts of practical things we can do, sending meals, doing shopping, sitting to give carers a break, just being on the end of a phone.



SILENCE

I needed a healer – Were you there?

You clothed me



Jesus talks about the naked and in 2023 this is not just those who have no clothes. In recent weeks we recognise that some people have lost everything, all their clothes as they have had to leave their homes for safety reasons, or their homes have been destroyed through war or flooding. However, there are those who feel naked because they have lost their identity; the homeless, the jobless, those who are in the midst of the breakup of a relationship, the bereaved who are suddenly widow rather than wife, widower rather than husband, orphan rather than son or daughter. What

about our young people who feel they have no identity because they have no self-esteem. Where can we minister to Jesus in these circumstances?

SILENCE

I was cold I was naked – Were you there?

You took me in



Then we have the stranger. In 2023 this is more than just welcoming our new neighbour, or the new family at church. In 2023 there are many people who are living in a strange country as they are refugees, they don't speak the language, they don't understand the systems and procedures they need to go through to get the very basic things of life – which may go back to food and drink and an identity because many of them will have left their identity behind in their country of birth.

A couple of years ago one Tuesday evening after the 10 o'clock news on BBC1 we came across a programme which really spoke to me "The Hotel For Refugees!" It was about Ballaghaderreen, a remote and traditional town in the west of Ireland. In March 2017, this small and staunchly Roman Catholic community received several hundred Syrian war-torn refugees," The town had a former luxury hotel which was turned into a centre housing refugees until their official papers and refugee status have been accepted. The hotel was run by Jackie and a team of volunteers. There are many lasting images from this programme – an old lady who runs a local shop hugging one of the refugees as he came into her shop; of Jackie organising a bus so that the refugees could get to a mosque 20 miles away for Friday Prayers; of the Muslim Syrian community in the hotel wanting to go to mass on Easter Sunday to share in the Christian celebrations, of how upset they were when they found out that they had missed the mass and then of the catholic priest who opened the church for them on Easter Sunday afternoon and allowed them to come in and pray, Catholics and Muslims praying with and for each other; of the local knitting group welcoming the refugees, unable to communicate verbally, but united through the universal language of knitting; of a Gaelic football match between the local team and the Syrians. I am sure that there was a lot of stirring up of preconceptions and expectations, but I think this small community was definitely ministering to Jesus!

How might we take people in?

SILENCE

I needed a shelter – Were you there?

I was a prisoner

The final group Jesus mentions is the prisoner and at first glance you might say, well there's not a lot I can do for prisoners. In fact across our very own Nottingham North East circuit people have been ministering to the prisoners at Lowdham Prison by knitting hats and gloves and scarves. But let's stir it up a bit again. What about the housebound - prisoners in their own homes - those with severe anxiety or agoraphobia. What about those addicted to drugs or alcohol – prisoners to their addiction. The poor – prisoners to poverty. Even parents to young children can feel prisoner to the endless sleepless nights, constant washing and feeding, constant caring.



SILENCE

When I was in prison – were you there

Loving God,

You ask the question – When I needed a neighbour – were you there?

Help us as we reflect on this passage to recognise the needs of those around us. Give us the courage to stir things up as we seek to be there and to act, in the knowledge that in doing so, we serve you who showed us how to serve.

Amen.

A few final thoughts.

First of all, please don't think that I have ministered to all the different people I have mentioned. As so often happens I am preaching to myself, and I have been left with a sense of "could do better." Secondly whilst this parable - if we want to call it that – stirs up our thinking about seeing Jesus in unexpected faces, unexpected places, unexpected situations, I don't think that it is saying we should ignore the needs of those familiar faces, those we are sitting alongside today or our friends or those we work with. Anyone of us may at some time be in those stirred up groups. The bible tells us that we are made in God's own image so in a sense we are all the faces of Jesus.

Finally we need to think about the motive for how we act. If we are saying that we are seeing Jesus himself in the people we serve, then our motive should not be to make ourselves look good, not even to earn brownie points with God, but rather our motive should be to glorify God through Jesus, so that the Kingdom may come and the feast of Christ the King will be for everyday not just for the last Sunday of the Christian year - and that would certainly stir things up!!!

Hymn – StF 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell

Let us build a house where love can dwell, all are welcome. But it was verse 4 which really spoke – that we must reach out beyond the wood and stone of our buildings to live the word, the message of Christ because here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face, All are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions.

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us.
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger.
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Collect for the day

We are going to finish our service by collecting up all our thoughts and prayers as we pray the collect of the day calling for the stirring up of the wills of God's faithful people.

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people,
that they bringing forth the fruit of good works,
may by you be richly rewarded:
through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen