

Christ the King Sunday - 22nd November 2020

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹²As 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. ¹³I 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. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶I 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.

Matthew 25: 31-36

“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. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then 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; ³⁵for 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, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’



The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Psalms 103, v. 19

Psalms 95: 1-7a

O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
³ For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
⁷ For he is our God,

Few of us are old enough to remember what life was like in 1925. It was a time of political turmoil in Europe, with on one hand the rise of communism and on the other hand the beginnings of rampant fascism.

It was in those troubled times that the feast day of Christ the King was inaugurated by Pope Pius XI, calling into question the power and authority of all earthly rulers and reminding believers that Christ must reign in our hearts and minds, our wills and our bodies.

Today's gospel passage is an apocalyptic vision of the day of judgement, a picture which takes its roots from a vision described by the prophet Ezekiel. In the vision the sheep will get their reward, but the goats will face eternal punishment.

So will we be sheep? Or will we be goats?

I suspect that many of us can look back to actions in our own lives which we now regret. What have we done for which we need to seek God's forgiveness? When in the past have we behaved more like goats than sheep? And how often have we stood by and failed to act against unjust treatment of others. Surely we must all share a part in the way God's creation has been mistreated, in our failure to protect the vulnerable in

society, our failure to protect our environment for future generations. We only have to look at the rise of Black Lives Matter to acknowledge that what might have been acceptable in the past is no longer acceptable in today's world.

God's judgement is something that seems somehow alien to our image of a creative, compassionate, forgiving and loving God. But why should we not expect God to judge us?

After all we are all guilty of judging others. Too often we judge other people by how they look, or by the way they dress, or by the way they speak, by their name or by the colour of their skin.

And Jesus declares that when he returns as king we too will be judged.

Judged by the way we have treated him. And the way we have treated him equates with the way we have treated '*the least of these who are members of my family*'. Jesus calls us to recognise him as king, to follow his example in the way we live our lives and to see him in others. To live out our faith by helping those in need - the hungry, the homeless, the refugee, the stranger, the marginalised, those who are struggling at this time of unprecedented job loss, unprecedented grief, fear and despair.

On this Christ the King Sunday may God give us the grace to trust him, and to reflect the power of Christ the King in our broken and frightened world.

Hymn Reflection from Malcolm Sturgess

For various reasons this Reflection has had to be written at the last minute. So I decided to choose a well-known hymn which I thought I knew about. The most interesting thing to discuss would be whether the organist should include the three-note da-di-da before the last line (which I think sounds silly). But I was in for a big surprise.

The words of *Rejoice, the Lord is King* are one of the earliest of Charles Wesley's approximately 6,500 hymns. He wrote hymns about everything under the sun, including earthquakes and Bonnie Prince Charlie. He asked Handel to write a tune specifically for the words, and in accordance with the custom of the time Handel wrote one conforming to the Affektenlehre Movement, whose idea was that "the principal role of music is to arouse the passions". i.e. A regal sort of tune to go with regal sort of words. That dispels one myth: that the tune *Gopsal* "came out of" some other work by Handel. It didn't. *Gopsal* (with two l's) is an estate in Leicestershire which was once owned by Handel's librettist, Charles Jennens.

So the next thing, as usual, was to check my facts on the Internet. There we read that THE TUNE for *Rejoice, the Lord is King* is *Darwall's 148th*. To most of us that means *Ye holy angels bright*. It says *Gopsal* "still appears in some hymn books", but doesn't fit the words very well, which was Wesley's fault! I own at least 100 different hymn books, and the only one I can find which pairs *Darwall* with *Rejoice, the Lord is King* is the Australian Hymn Book of 1977. Hymnary.org is an American organisation, but my only modern American hymn book does not include the hymn at-all.

I'd never thought of it, but the pairing does work very well. Perhaps we could try it some time?

**Rejoice, the Lord is King, Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals, give thanks and sing, And triumph evermore.**

***Lift up your heart, lift 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, etc.***

**His kingdom cannot fail; He rules o'er earth and heaven;
The keys of death and hell Are to our Jesus given. *Lift up, etc.***

**He sits at God's right hand Till all his foes submit,
And bow to his command, And fall beneath his feet. *Lift up, etc.***