

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**CHRIST the KING SUNDAY**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP** *(from Psalm 100)*

- One: Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth!  
Serve the Lord with gladness!
- All: Come into the presence of the Lord with singing!**
- One: Know that the Lord is God,  
who made us, and to whom we belong.
- All: We are God's people,  
and the sheep of God's pasture.**
- One: Enter God's gates with thanksgiving,  
and the courts of the Lord with praise.
- All: Give thanks to God, bless the name of the Lord.**
- One: For the Lord is good,  
everlasting in steadfast love,  
faithful generation after generation.
- All: Come, let us worship the Lord!**

**OPENING HYMN** "Crown Him with Many Crowns" GtG 268

- One: Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne;
- All: hark, how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own!**
- One: Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,
- All: and hail him as thy matchless King  
through all eternity.**

One: Crown him the Lord of love;  
**All: behold his hands and side,**  
One: rich wounds, yet visible above,  
**All: in beauty glorified:**  
One: no angel in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
**All: but downward bends his burning eye**  
**at mysteries so bright.**

One: Crown him the Lord of peace,  
whose power a scepter sways  
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
**All: absorbed in prayer and praise.**  
One: His reign shall know no end;  
**All: and round his pierced feet**  
**fair flowers of paradise extend**  
**their fragrance ever sweet.**

One: Crown him the Lord of years,  
the potentate of time;  
**All: creator of the rolling spheres,**  
**ineffably sublime.**  
One: All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For thou hast died for me;  
**All: thy praise shall never, never fail**  
**throughout eternity.**

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#### UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**O Lord our God, we confess**  
**that we are not ready for your holy realm.**  
**You guide us toward right paths,**  
**but we refuse to follow where you lead.**  
**You love and feed and care for us,**  
**but we fail to love and serve others.**  
**Forgive our self-concern that shuts out others and cuts us off from you.**  
**Forgive us, merciful God,**  
**that we may return to your fold**  
**and rejoice in your presence;**  
**through Jesus Christ our Lord,**  
**the Lamb upon the throne. Amen.**

#### SILENT CONFESSION

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One:           However long we wander,  
                  however far we stray,  
                  God's steadfast love endures forever.  
                  Sisters and brothers, be assured:  
                  in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

All:           **Thanks be to God!**

## THE PEACE

One:           The peace of Christ be with you.

All:           **And also with you.**  
*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

## THE WORD

**SCRIPTURE READINGS** Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24  
                                  Matthew 25:31-46  
                                  Ephesians 1:15-23

Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24 (New Revised Standard Version +)

<sup>11</sup> For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd seeks out the flock when some in the flock have been scattered, so will I seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered during the time of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup> I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will feed them on Israel's highlands, along the riverbeds, and in all the inhabited places. <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their pasture; there they will lie down in good grazing land, and they will feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will feed my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup> The lost I will seek, the strays I will return, the broken I will bind up, the weak I will strengthen; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

...  
<sup>20</sup> Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup> You shove with shoulder and flank, and with your horns you ram all the weak sheep until you have scattered them far and wide, <sup>22</sup> but I will save my flock, so that they will never again be prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

<sup>23</sup> I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will feed them: he will feed them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup> And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Matthew 25:31-46 (New Revised Standard Version +)

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Humankind comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate them from each other 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, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> 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.’ <sup>37</sup> 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? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, in as much as you did it for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.’ <sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those on his left, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> 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.’ <sup>44</sup> 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 care for you?’ <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, in as much as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.’ <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Ephesians 1:15-23 (New Revised Standard Version +)

<sup>15</sup> I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, <sup>18</sup> so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope of God’s calling, what is the richness of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the overwhelming greatness of God’s power that is working among us who believe, according to the working of God’s mighty strength. <sup>20</sup> God’s power was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and sat him at God’s right side in the heavens, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> God put everything under Christ’s feet and made him head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills everything in every way.

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** “Shepherd Monarch” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Shepherd Monarch.

A strange, and profound, mix.

From the highest of high...

...to the lowest of low.

From being “*at God’s right side in the heavens, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named*”...

...to the very “*least of these*”: the battered and bruised, the lost and alone, the down and without.

Shepherd. Monarch.

From, “There, there, I’ll take care of you” (spoken soothingly).

To, “There! There! You go there, not there” (spoken sternly).

Today is Christ the King Sunday.

And our passages for this Sunday want us to be clear who it is we celebrate.

Both Ezekiel and Matthew emphasize both...

...the high-ness: the majesty and authority of the Lord God who will shepherd the people; the Son of Humankind in his all glory...

...and the low-ness: the scattered sheep, lost and bruised, broken and hungry; the naked and lonely, the sick and imprisoned, the outcasts and ‘down and out’.

And the Lord on high is to be found with the low.

The Monarch (highest high) so identifies with the lowest of the low -- is so close to, so present with the very least -- that any act of kindness offered to the least is experienced as an act of kindness for the Monarch.

The Highest One is encountered in the lowest.

This is the one we call king: “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant*” (Philippians 2:6-7a).

This is the one we call king: the good shepherd who gives his life for his flock “*that they might have life and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10).

This is the one we call king: the Lord who eats with sinners and tax collectors, with the sick and outcasts, so why would we expect him to be anywhere else?

The question is: Where are we?

Are we like those who push and shove others out of the way, because we think we’re the best and we deserve better than them?

Are we like those who ignore others? Are we blind to the needs of others? Do we simply not see them?

And so we are like the goats.

In that picture of the judgment at the end of history (Matthew 25), notice that the “*eternal punishment*” for the goats is, in essence, banishment from the presence of the King. “*Depart from me*” (v.41) he says.

But the question must be asked: Have they not already separated themselves from the presence of the King by failing to see “the least of these”?

And note the complement to this observation: that the sheep have, in some way, already “*inherited the kingdom prepared for you*” (v.34) and entered into “*eternal life*” (v.46) by “**living a life of mercy,**” as one person describes it (Working Preacher, 2020); and so being already in the presence of the King himself.

Shepherd Monarch.

High. Low.

A strange mix.

And in this mix, we discern a pointed reminder of where we are called.

In this mix, we discern a powerful reminder we are not on our own.

In this mix, we discern a pervasive reminder of what it means to claim Christ as King, to proclaim “Jesus is Lord!”

For when the King says, “Do this,” we do that.

When the Son the Son of Humankind says, “Follow me here,” we follow where he leads.

And the one who says, “Go!” goes with us.

The one who seeks the lost sheep seeks us when we are lost.

The one who strengthens the weak strengthens us when we are weak.

AND...

The one who strengthens us calls us to strengthen others.

The one who bandages us up when we are battered invites us to bind up the wounds of others.

The one who feeds us in our hunger expects us to feed the hungry.

That’s where we go.

And we go, knowing we do not go on our own, but we go with his power.

As Beverly Gaventa points out (commenting on Ephesians 1):

**The power already at work in the community ... is none other than the power that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to heavenly places.**

**... That Christ has already triumphed means that the church itself will surely be sustained by God’s power. (Texts-315)**

We go, knowing we do not go on our own, but we go with his presence, because he's already where he calls us.

Dirk Lange highlights this implication for the mission of the church. We tend to think of our coming together in church as coming to God. But, in some ways, the exact opposite is the truth. When we go out, when we reach out, this

**move outwards [is] a move towards God!** (Working Preacher, 2020)

Because that's where God is.

Where are we?

Brian Wren wrote a hymn from the perspective of the King, the Son of Humankind, who says,

**1. Here am I,  
where underneath the bridges  
in our winter cities  
homeless people sleep.  
Here am I,  
where in decaying houses  
little children shiver,  
crying at the cold.  
Where are you?**

**2. Here am I,  
with people in the lineup,  
anxious for a handout,  
aching for a job.  
Here am I,  
when pensioners and strikers  
sing and march together,  
wanting something new.  
Where are you?**

("Here Am I" 1983; in *Sing the Faith*, 2003)

Let us commit to be with the Highest of the High who is with the lowest of the low,  
as we proclaim Christ the King

in our words,  
in our deeds,  
in our very lives.

## **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.**

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,  
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,**

**we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks  
and to live holy and joyful lives,**

**even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,  
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

*(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)*

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**Pastor:** Lord, in your mercy...

**People:** ...hear our prayer.

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(Contemporary)*

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**

## **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Almighty God,  
we give you thanks and praise for your love  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Accept the offering of our lives in union with Christ's offering for us.  
Confirm in us his work and his vision  
that we may testify to the sovereignty of his love  
and honor his presence in all people.  
In his name we pray.  
Amen.**

**SENDING**

**CLOSING HYMN** "The Church of Christ in Every Age" GtG 320

One: The church of Christ in every age,  
beset by change but Spirit-led,  
must claim and test its heritage  
and keep on rising from the dead.

**All: Across the world, across the street,  
the victims of injustice cry  
for shelter and for bread to eat,  
and never live before they die.**

One: Then let the servant church arise,  
**All: a caring church that longs to be  
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,  
and clothed in Christ's humanity.**

One: For Christ alone, whose blood was shed,  
can cure the fever in our blood,  
**All: and teach us how to share our bread  
and feed the starving multitude.**

One: We have no mission but to serve  
in full obedience to our Lord:  
**All: to care for all, without reserve,  
and spread Christ's liberating word.**

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## CHARGE AND BLESSING

One: We will share God's compassion for all.

**All: We will join God's work for justice.**

One: God sends us to all who need our help.

**All: Christ meets us, in them, as gifts are shared.**

One: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,  
May God who seeks the lost keep you;  
may God who brings back the wandering heart  
uphold you;  
may God who binds up the injured heal you;  
may God who strengthens the weak empower you,  
now and forever.

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

**All: ...Amen.**

## POSTLUDE

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