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SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT A

22nd November 2026

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

If you have a candle, find it and something to light it. Put it somewhere you can see it. If you do not have a candle, use a lamp.

As you light the candle, or light the lamp, say these words

“the light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never put it out”

Sit in silence and notice the light and the shadows in the room.

When you are ready, offer this time of worship to God by saying these words aloud:

Jesus, you are the light of the world, the light of my life, I offer this time to you in worship and prayer and praise.

Amen

You may now wish to say the Lord’s Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Reading: Matthew 25: 31-46 – Click for reading

Responding to the reading

Today’s gospel reading is a striking passage to arrive at on the Sunday before Advent. We are standing at the end of the church year, looking back over the story of Jesus before we begin again with the waiting, hoping and anticipation of Advent.

And on this Sunday that is sometimes referred to as ‘Christ the King Sunday’, Matthew gives us this image of a king seated on a throne, surrounded by glory, separating people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats.

It sounds like a scene of power and judgement. And yet, as the story unfolds, Jesus offers us a rather unexpected picture of what that power looks like. The king does not ask who attended worship most faithfully. He does not ask who had the correct theology, who knew the Scriptures best, or who belonged to the right religious community.

Instead, he asks about something much more ordinary: did you feed the hungry? Did you give drink to the thirsty? Did you welcome the stranger? Did you clothe the naked? Did you care for the sick? Did you visit the prisoner?

And then comes the extraordinary revelation: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these … you did it to me.” The king is found among the people we might least expect. That is a remarkable way to end the church year, because we can spend a great deal of time looking for God in the places where we expect to find God: in churches, beautiful buildings, familiar prayers and hymns, in the people whose faith seems most like our own.

And there is nothing wrong with finding God in those places, but Jesus tells us that if we really want to recognise him, we must also learn to look elsewhere. We must look among people who are hungry, homeless, who have arrived in unfamiliar places, hoping to find safety, among people whose illnesses have left them isolated, among people in prison, among those people society has decided are inconvenient, unworthy or somehow to blame for their own circumstances.

If we want to know where Christ is, Jesus tells us to look towards the people we are most likely to overlook.

That is what makes this passage uncomfortable, because it is possible to believe deeply in Jesus and still fail to recognise him when he appears in the lives of other people. We can sing about love while ignoring suffering. We can pray for peace while remaining indifferent to injustice. We can celebrate the generosity of God while resenting the people who need our generosity. We can speak about the kingdom of heaven while helping to maintain a world in which some people have far more than they need and others struggle for the basics of life.

How we treat the people around us reveals something about what we truly believe.

Not because we can earn God's love through good behaviour, but because love, if it is real, eventually becomes visible. It becomes a meal shared, a stranger welcomed, a voice raised against injustice.

Sometimes it means giving practical help. Sometimes it means changing the conditions that leave people needing help in the first place. Feeding the hungry matters. So does asking why people are going hungry. Welcoming the stranger matters. So does challenging the hostility that makes strangers unsafe.

As we prepare to begin Advent, we might imagine that we are waiting for Christ to come. We will light candles and remember the child born into poverty, far from the centres of power, but Matthew's Gospel invites us to consider whether we are waiting for someone we have already been given opportunities to encounter. Is the Christ not in our midst all the time, amongst the ‘least of these?’ Perhaps Christ has been calling to us through the needs of our community, asking us not simply to feel compassion, but to become part of the answer.

The Sunday before Advent asks us to consider what sort of king we are waiting for. Not a king who measures greatness by wealth, status or the ability to command others, but a king whose glory is revealed in compassion.

Perhaps this is the kingdom we are called to build: not a perfect world that we can somehow create through our own efforts, but a world in which fewer people are hungry, fewer people are abandoned, fewer people are treated as disposable, and more people know what it means to belong.

We cannot do everything, we will not always get it right, but we can learn to look differently. We can ask who is missing from our tables, our churches and our communities. We can notice who is struggling. We can challenge the systems that diminish people. We can practice a love that moves beyond sentiment into action. And we can remember that when we reach towards another human being with dignity and compassion, we may find ourselves much closer to Christ than we ever imagined.

Are we ready to recognise the Christ who comes to us in the people we least expect?

Who is hungry, lonely or excluded in my community, and what might a loving response look like?

Where do I need to move beyond charitable feelings towards challenging the causes of suffering?

Who might I be failing to see because I have already decided what they are worth?

May we learn to recognise Christ in the faces of those we encounter. May our worship make us more compassionate, our faith make us more courageous, and our hope make us more committed to justice. May we never be so busy looking for God in the heavens that we fail to notice God standing beside us in human need. And as we prepare for the coming

of Christ, may we discover that the kingdom we long for begins to take shape whenever we feed, welcome, care, challenge and love.

Amen.

Hymn / Song:
440 STF – Amazing grace – how sweet the sound – YouTube

Blessing

Go out from here and stand for justice, stand for unity, stand for inclusion.

Go out from here, filled not with judgement, but with grace, not with selfishness, but with mercy, not with jealousy, but with unity.

Go out from here, and may the Spirit of God go with each and every one of you, in Jesus' name

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers For This Week

Monday 23rd November

- Holy, holy, holy Lord,
  God of grace and wisdom,
  All creation is here for your glory.
  Help me to reflect that glory back to you, today, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday 24th November

- Today, why not use the moments when you might need (or want!) to spend money as a chance to give thanks for all that you have received. Perhaps you are going shopping, perhaps buying a stamp or a coffee or paying a bill.
- Take a moment to mark this interaction with gratitude. What else do you need to give thanks to God for?

Wednesday 25th November

- The metaphor of a journey has long been used to help us think about our Christian life of discipleship. Take some time today to reflect on your journey. Where are you at on your walk with God? What is coming up next? How could you take the best next step with Jesus?
- Pray about anything that comes up in your time of reflection. If helpful, you might like to find someone you trust with whom you can discuss it.

Thursday 26th November

- Be still. In the stillness, notice the rhythm of your own breathing, the pulse of your own heartbeat, the aches and movements of your own body.
- You might like to pray for yourself, for your physical body, for the gift of life, for the activities, thoughts and reflections that are made possible by this day.
- May this day be a gift to you, a gift from God.

Friday 27th November

- Come, Holy Spirit, and make yourself known to me this day, I pray.
  Help me to follow in the call you have placed on my life, and to listen to the gentle promptings towards love, towards grace, towards peace that I can sense from you today.
  Help me to worship you, O God, this and every day. Amen.

Saturday 28th November

- If you have chance today (and if the weather allows!) take a moment to find the horizon (perhaps from outside, or from a window in your home). As you look at the horizon, pray about the future. What are some of the things coming up in your life that you might be worried or hopeful about? What about in the life of the world?
- As you scan along the horizon, pray that you, and all around you, may be able to sense God's guiding hand at work as we face the future together.