

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

As we seek to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament current and historic injustices on this land. We know we gather today as guests on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ. We live here not knowing the full story of the land and its people but seeking to learn more, and, by the grace of God, trying to walk a more hopeful and helpful path.

Call to Worship (Psalm 100)

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Worship the LORD with gladness; come into God's presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God. The Lord made us; we belong to God.

We are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture.

Enter the gates of the Lord with thanksgiving, and God's courts with praise.

Give thanks to the Lord, bless God's name. For the LORD is good;

God's steadfast love endures forever, God's faithfulness to all generations.

□ **A Song of Praise (800's):** *All glory, laud and honor* **214**

Words to Ponder... Christ the King

Christ the King / Reign of Christ Sunday marks the close of the Christian liturgical year. In our service today we move through Christian hymnody from the ninth century to the twenty-first, spanning over 1300 years of singing in the Church. As we follow the order of worship, we also remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – celebrating his reign in the world and in our lives. The meaning of the title Christ or Messiah is “king” – “the anointed one” – the one anointed to be sovereign. This day can serve as a review of the life and work of Christ Jesus – a testimony that everything in creation and culture must yield to Christ. It is an invitation to each of us to submit actively and joyfully to Jesus. May we experience God's abiding faithfulness as we sing through the centuries, knowing that siblings in Christ throughout the ages and the world have sung God's praise before us.

† Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

Creating God, we come before you this morning aware that we belong to you. We rejoice in your creation. Redeeming God, we come before you this morning blessed that you gave your Son in love for us. We rejoice in your love. Sustaining God, we come before you this morning inspired by your Spirit that lives within us. We rejoice in your presence.

Have mercy on us O God as we confess that we often ignore and abuse your creation. We admit that we do not live the love you have shown us. We acknowledge our resistance to your presence in our lives and our relationships. Hear our silent confession also O God, as you heard the confession of the criminal on the cross...

Holy One, draw us together as a reconciled community so that we may worship you with our whole being, today and every day. We pray together as we are led by Jesus ... ***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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

The Lord alone grants us the grace to live the life of discipleship to which we are called. Accept the forgiveness of your sin – embrace the new life you have been given – giving thanks to God always.

□ **A Song of Penitence/Forgiveness (1500's): *Lord, have mercy* 547**

† Prayer for Understanding

Holy One, break into our hearts and lives today as we read your Sacred Word. Through your unexpected and awesome deeds, guide us to know you as our God and ourselves as your grateful people. Amen

Scripture

Ephesians 1: 15-23 [NT 192]

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 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 him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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 age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Matthew 25: 31-46 [NT 29]

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. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then 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; 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, 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.'

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? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 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.'

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 take care of you?'

Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message

When we are blessed to have the Rev. Cathy Victor lead worship at Knox, I am always grateful for her ability to connect art and scripture. She has such expertise in this area that I am a bit nervous to make a small attempt myself today, but I am thankful for her inspiration to look to the art world as a way to interpret and relate to scripture. Thanks also to Debbie Thomas and her essay entitled *"You Did It To Me"*.

In early 2013, Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz unveiled *Homeless Jesus*, a bronze sculpture depicting Jesus as a homeless person, sleeping on a park bench. Schmalz installed the original sculpture at Regis College, University of Toronto, and since then, casts have been installed worldwide. The sculpture is designed in such a way that Jesus is huddled beneath a blanket, his face and hands obscured. Only the crucifixion wounds on his feet reveal his identity.

I asked Tristan and his girlfriend, Bahareh, to take pictures of the copy of this sculpture that is in Vancouver near his home there. This copy of the *Homeless Jesus* statue was installed outside Vancouver's Holy Rosary Cathedral in May 2017.



Schmalz
noted in a

2015 interview with CBC that *if you look at the history of Christian artwork, most of the representations of Jesus have him embodied as physical perfection. Even when he's dying on the cross, his abs are just stunning. So, this is a breakaway from that. I started thinking, how would Jesus want to be portrayed? Would he want to be made out of marble, perfect and wavy, with beautiful gowns? And if you read the Gospels, I don't think that would really interest him. I think he would want to be represented like the least of his brothers.* He describes the sculpture as a *visual translation* of our Gospel reading for this week, in which Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, and then tells his followers: *"Whatever you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*

Not surprisingly, reactions to the statue vary. Some people find it offensive. Others adore it. People sit and pray beside it. In one city, a woman called the police within minutes of the sculpture's installation, assuming that the figure beneath the blanket was a real homeless person. The artist reacted to controversy about the statue saying: *Some people just don't get it... because they're used to seeing Christian artwork done in a certain way. But this is only as shocking as the Gospels are.*

This week the Church celebrates *the Reign of Christ*, a liturgical hinge between the long season of ordinary time after Pentecost and the beginning of Advent. We pause this week to reflect on the meaning of Christ's reign over the Church, the world, and our lives. What kind of king is Jesus? What does his rule look and feel like? What does it mean to live and thrive under his sovereignty?

Throughout the year, Christ has been the focus of our theological reflections. Perhaps this is a day we can look both backward and forward in Christ. In our service today we are singing songs that span centuries of faithful expression in the church. Through the order of worship, we also remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – celebrating his reign in the world and in our lives.

The title *Christ or Messiah* means “king” – “*the anointed one*” – the one anointed to be king. There are other days on the church calendar for worshipping Christ the baby, Christ the teacher, Christ the friend – Christ the healer or physician. Today we stand before the throne to worship – to pay special attention to the cosmic character of Christ.

This day can serve as a review of the life and work of Christ and remind us of who he is – our king and our judge. Everything in creation and culture must yield to Christ the King – we must submit actively and joyfully to the absolute and unlimited rule of Christ who knows everything about us. A truly sobering thought!

Given the power and pageantry we typically associate with kings, we might expect the lectionary to give us readings that sound, well, kingly. Something gorgeous from the Book of Revelation, perhaps, about Jesus decked out in splendid robes and a jeweled crown. Or something majestic from Isaiah: *A son will be given to us, and the government will rest upon his shoulders*. Or at least a shiny moment from the Gospels: Jesus transfigured on the mountaintop. Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus emerging from the waters of baptism, heaven thundering in his ears.

But no. The royalty Jesus describes in Matthew's Gospel is of another order, entirely. It is homeless Jesus – sick Jesus – imprisoned Jesus – hungry Jesus – naked Jesus.

The passage from Matthew's Gospel reminds us that God sees, knows and remembers all we have done – all we do – and with this knowledge God will sort us out. This parable – this cautionary tale – is told to encourage us to live as Jesus lived – to assure us that the reign of Christ will involve judgment. Yet Jesus's humble kingship is somehow both a typical royal court where the monarch is surrounded by courtiers with the whole populace gathered before the throne waiting for a critical decision and the vision of a shepherd at the end of the day separating sheep from goats as they enter the safety of the fold. Perhaps we need to see this alternative to empire, nationalism, consumerism and secularism even more today than they did in ancient times.

So much of our society refuses to see and tend to Jesus in our most vulnerable neighbors. Is not our sick king even now lying in hospital beds? Is not our king hungry, thirsty, and naked, struggling with unemployment and soaring costs of living? Isn't Jesus even now languishing in prison cells, feeling utterly expendable – out of sight, out of mind?

Instead of embracing the countercultural possibility of a humble, wounded king, we seem more comfortable with a version of kingship that is all about domination, supremacy, triumphalism, and greatness. We are not so sure about the Jesus in the sheepfold, forgetting that the only power Jesus wielded on earth was the power to give himself away. He's the king who entered humanity red-faced and crying; a king whose greatest displays of power included riding on a donkey – washing dirty feet – hanging on a cross and frying fish on a beach for his agnostic friends. How did we go from this God who empties themselves of all privilege, the God who perpetually pours themselves out and surrenders their own life for others – to God as Iron Man?

We long to *see Jesus*. We pray for an experience of Jesus' presence – yearn to feel him close. We sing hymns, recite creeds, hear sermons, and attend Bible studies – all in the hope of seeing and knowing Jesus in a deeper and more meaningful way. And that is all good of course – unless all the churchy things we do keep us at comfortable arm's length from where Jesus actually is. Unless they lead us to believe that the work of justice and compassion is somehow secondary to the “real” business of following Jesus. The real business of Christianity is bending the knee to Jesus – and he is found in the least and the lost – the broken and the wounded. Jesus is in the un-pretty places – the bodies we don't discuss in polite company – the faces we don't smile at – intersections we speed through.

It's not that we earn our way to salvation – we can't care for the vulnerable just to become the chosen sheep at the foot of majestic king Jesus. It is that majestic king Jesus, by his own choice and volition, has stooped and surrendered in such a way that he IS the vulnerable. If we want to see Jesus, that is where we need to spend our time and energy. There's no other way to get to him.

Why is this so challenging for me – for us? Am I afraid? Do I feel inadequate – too vulnerable? Is it beneath me? Why is the mercy Jesus invites into so difficult to embrace? Jesuit theologian James Keenan defines mercy as “*the willingness to enter into the chaos of others.*” A great definition. Maybe that's what we're afraid of – other people's chaos – the world's chaos.

I think it is natural and okay to be afraid – to have questions. It's okay to see the huddled figure on the bench and not know exactly what to do. But at some point, our fears must come face to face with reality: “*Whatever you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*”



Our lectionary reading – a reading that describes the final judgment of all humanity – says nothing about belief. It depicts a scene from the heavenly throne room – describing the culmination of history, when all nations will gather before Christ and Christ will separate the people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. Notice the criteria our Saviour and king uses for the separation: not our confessions of faith – not our beliefs – not our doctrinal commitments – not our “personal relationships” with Jesus, no matter how life-giving these things may be. No, the criteria will be compassion – and compassion alone.

Everyone is judged and it seems that everyone is surprised by that judgment. Those who are blessed don't expect to be blessed and those who are accursed don't expect to be accursed. Why is it that we are so surprised? Perhaps because this is our king, not exactly as expected, and we are meant to be provoked and bewildered by his priorities.

Soon, we will enter into Advent, a season of waiting, longing, and listening. Soon we will walk into the expectant darkness – waiting for the light to dawn – for the first cries of a vulnerable baby to redefine kingship, authority, and power forever. But on this Sunday, here and now, we are asked to see Jesus in places we'd rather not look. We are asked to remember that every encounter we have with *the least of these* is an actual encounter with Jesus. It's not a metaphor. It's not wordplay. It's not optional. The person huddled beneath the blanket is our king.



□ **A Song of Response (1600's):** *Salvation and immortal praise* 629

† Pastoral Prayers

Merciful God, your goodness outdistances our imagination. When we ponder your ways and your gifts, our words cannot contain the riches of your regard for us. We believe that you made us in your image and likeness and breathed into us the breath of your Holy Spirit. Make us more like you in sharing your goodness with the world. May Christ Jesus reign in our midst.

Show us the privilege of feeding the hungry, satisfying the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick or those in prison. When we ourselves are in need and others reach out to us, grant us grace to receive thankfully what is offered in love. Come, Christ Jesus, reign in our lives.

Fill your church with passion for your mission entrusted to its care. Reform and transform its life and make it a worthy vessel of the good news of your love. Reshape our wills to your own that we may be one people in your one church. Forgive the racism and every sin that excludes those you have welcomed in the body of Christ. Come, Christ Jesus, reign in your church.

Holy and Triune God of all creation, call forth from your people voices of hope in a world wounded by warfare and disfigured by violence of every kind. Open our lives to worthy possibilities for justice and peace. Prevent the voices of violence from prevailing in the midst of people of goodwill. Come, Christ Jesus, reign in the entire world.

Grace-filled God, listen now to the prayers of each heart offered silently or aloud in this community of faith...

Hear our prayers O God and in your mercy answer. Amen

□ **A Song of Jesus' Birth (1700's):** *Joy to the world (verses 1 + 4)* 153

□ **A Song of Jesus' Death (1800's):** *Beneath the cross of Jesus (verse 1)*
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Offering and Prayer

God has blessed us in Christ and in creation with all that we need to thrive. Yet Jesus' story reminds us there are many who do not have what they need. What we offer today will reach out in Jesus' name to touch lives in need with the love of God.

□ **A Song of Jesus' Resurrection (1900's):**
Alleluia! Alleluia! Give thanks... (verses 1 + 2) 260

Generous God, you envision a world where the hungry are fed and strangers are welcomed. We bring these gifts to put your vision into action. Bless them and the

lives they will touch so that the love of Jesus Christ wears a human face again for those who need him in our time. Amen

□ **A Song of Our Life in the Church (2000's): *Here I am to worship***

Blessing

We belong to God – let us live for God and die for God. We belong to God – may God's wisdom and will rule all our actions. We belong to God – enable all parts of our lives to strive toward God. And may the grace of the living Christ, the love of God, and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

□ **A Song of Praise (2000's): *We will go out with joy* 539 (PCUSA)**