The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

Christ the King

Sunday 22 November 2026

Readings:

Ephesians 1 v15- end

Matthew 25 v31- end

The Venerable Kate Peacock

The Archdeacon of Stansted

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This week the Church celebrates the feast of Christ the King, when we remember and acknowledge Christ's authority over the entire world, and as Lord of our own lives. It is a feast of celebration and awe at the wonder of God in Christ, and a last celebration – a New Years Eve, before the liturgical year begins again next week on Advent Sunday and our gaze turns to Bethlehem. The church in its liturgy and worship is closing a season of remembrance. A few weeks ago we pondered the wonder of the feast of All Saints – and remembered those great and godly men and women who lived lives of holiness and devotion. Women and men who inspired others and shone with the light of Christ.

Just after that we remembered all souls – all those whom we have loved and lost and remembered them before God, entrusting them to his safe keeping. Many of us lighting candles in remembrance, and giving thanks for their love for us, and ours for them. And then of course we moved to Remembrance Sunday, remembering all those who had given their lives in service of their country, those who had served in costly and sacrificial ways, in the pursuit of freedom and justice. Remembering as ever, is a profoundly moving and humbling act. And then last week in church, many of us remembered those whom the church had hurt or harmed, we repented and lamented and committed ourselves afresh to work tirelessly for the safety of all in the life of the church. Safeguarding Sunday has for me, become a hard remembering of failures and a recommitment to responding well and better. We have collectively, been through a period of profound and intense remembering.

And so today, with all that behind us, and with all those saints, sinners, soldiers and survivors in mind, we remember not just who we are, but whose we are. Under the Kingship of Christ – to him be all glory in heaven and on earth. Today we remember afresh Christ is King.

A final celebration before we turn again to Bethlehem and wonder anew at the glory and the paradox at the heart of our faith – God as human, one of us. Emmanuel. With us and one of us, for us and in us. King and Lord of all, and a vulnerable baby.

In the last few weeks in our churches we have heard much from Matthew in his Gospel, hearing Jesus' message of the nature of God's Kingdom – the Beatitudes and the abundant mercy of God, the wise and foolish bridesmaids, the need to be ready and prepared, the parable of the talents, to use well and rightly all that God has given us and called us to – For God's kingdom is unlike any other. Founded on love and service, mercy and hope. Our call is to be ready – to herald it's coming, to notice when God is at work already, to proclaim his love and to pray Thy Kingdom Come.

Christ's Kingship is so different from worldly Kings - we have heard of a King who invited all the poor and the slaves to a wedding feast. We have heard of a Kingdom of which we don't know when it is coming, and like the bridesmaids awaiting the bridegroom we are encouraged to be always ready. And today we hear of a Kingdom unlike any other, in that when we help, clothe, feed or nourish someone in need we are in turn doing those same acts of service to the King. And likewise, when we fail to help, clothe, feed and nourish someone that same slight and failure is given also to the King. For our King, is present in each of his subjects – God is present, indwelling in each and every person. That divine spark of divinity held in all of those who bear his image. And when we really see one another, when we look into each others faces, we see, not just their beauty and uniqueness, but the face of Christ. The face of the King of all the world. To see Christ in one another, to see the inherent dignity to each human being, is to have compassion. To allow our hearts to be enlarged, to grow in generosity, to reach out with a cup of water, a meal, a smile, an act of kindness. For when we are truly kind, we serve not just each other, but Christ himself.

But Christ is different as our King, he knows each of us intimately, the hairs of our head are counted, we are called by name. He knows when we help or wilfully ignore, he knows (to follow the Gospel imagery this morning) when we are sheep or goats, when we do what is right, loving and good and when we get it woefully wrong. His Kingdom is different, founded in love and in compassion. He leads us as a shepherd leads a flock, caring for each one of us, counting us in and counting us out; leading us each day to safety, to new grass for nourishment and to warmth and safety at night.

Today's call is to choose to follow as sheep, that great and good shepherd of us all – choosing lives of compassion and kindness, seeing in each other the face of Christ – Shepherd and King. Choosing to remember, remember who we and whose we are, sheep of the Good Shepherd, child of the most high, servant of the King. And to remember today that Christ is King – Lord of All. To him be the glory.