

# The Bride Valley Telephone Service for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November

## Christ the King – Sunday before Advent

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God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore, we will not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains tremble in the heart of the sea; though the waters rage and swell, and though the mountains quake at the towering seas. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place of the dwelling of the Most High. *Psalms 46 1-4*

1 Let all the world in every corner sing:  
My God and King!  
The heavens are not too high,  
his praise may thither fly;  
the earth is not too low,  
his praises there may grow.  
Let all the world in every corner sing:  
My God and King!

*Hymn: Let all the world in every corner sing*  
2 Let all the world in every corner sing:  
My God and King!  
The church with psalms must shout,  
no door can keep them out;  
but above all, the heart  
must bear the longest part.  
Let all the world in every corner sing:  
My God and King!

*George Herbert (1593-1633) (Public Domain)*

### ***Prayer of Confession***

In the beauty of the earth, in the silence of our hearts, in the community of your church, in all acts of grace and kindness, in forgiving from the heart and in worship from the soul, your Spirit confirms the truth in which we seek to live.

If knowing this, we have failed to love you, our Maker, been hesitant to follow your Son, and suspected the power of your Spirit, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

If we have desired comfort more than devotion and if we have satisfied our wants more than we have served your will, Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

If we have limited our company to those like us and if we have restricted our conversation to matters of no consequence, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

### ***Absolution***

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### ***Collect***

*Let us pray:* Eternal Father, whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord and King: keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

### ***Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 23:1-6***

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and

multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

### ***Epistle: Colossians 1:11-20***

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

### ***Gospel: Luke 23:33-43***

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.' One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

### ***Reflection***

Surely this is a very strange gospel reading to choose for Christ the King Sunday, the question that cries out from the page is, "If Jesus can't save himself, how can he save us?"

The taunting of the leaders, soldiers and the one criminal: "If you are the King / Messiah, save yourself," are all part of the humiliation of Jesus that is intended not only to kill him physically, but to also kill him "inspirationally." That is, to make sure that all hopes and dreams that the crowds had begun to place in Jesus were also terminated. This will be a shameful death; an excruciating death; a degrading death. His followers will not be able to glory in his noble death as a martyr for their cause.

Their taunting reveals a new found sense of confidence. Finally, they can challenge Jesus publicly and he will not have a parable or question that will only further embarrass them; further prove their powerlessness before him. They are demonstrating **THEIR** power and authority is now **THE** power and authority, and folks had better start paying attention to what **THEY** say, and forget about this Jesus fella. The sign over Jesus' head might just as well have said:

Look what we did to Jesus, imagine what we will do to you!

So. Why doesn't Jesus save himself?

He's done some pretty amazing miracles in the past. Why doesn't he just climb down from the cross? Or even, at a minimum, why doesn't he have some witty remark to once again rebut the taunting? He has always bested his opponents in the past, why not now?

What sort of Saviour can't even save himself? How can this be good news?

A couple of things from Jesus' past complicate any easy response.

First, we know that Jesus does not "do" miracles on demand. That's because Jesus was not a miracle worker. That is, the core of his purpose was not to "do" miracles. Jesus "does" miracles only as natural signs of the real presence of the Kingdom of God being really "at hand." In other words, Jesus is not an entertainer. Jesus is not here to amuse and amaze.

Second, Jesus has already dealt with this taunt way back in Luke 4:9-13:

*Then the devil took (Jesus) to Jerusalem, and placed him on a high pinnacle of the temple saying, "If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written:*

*'He will command his angels, concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'*

*Jesus answered him, "It is said, Do not put the Lord your God to the test." When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

The taunting of Jesus on the cross is actually a temptation; a temptation to mis-understand and mis-use the nature of God and of Jesus' relationship with God.

And it is a temptation that is contained in the one sneaky little word, "If." "IF you are the Messiah ..." raises the hidden possibility that maybe you're not. The word, "if," raises questions and doubts about the true nature of God and of Jesus' relationship with God and demands an immediate, conclusive, answer. It gets us thinking - or rather, doubting. And it shifts us from relating with Jesus to reasoning about him; from love to logic; from our hearts to our heads:

*If Jesus really is the son of God, why doesn't he save himself? What does it mean to believe in a Saviour who doesn't save himself?*

All of us would very much like to have a saviour who would come to the rescue, kill the bad guys, cure the disease, end the injustice, and solve every painful circumstance. But that's not the kind of saviour Jesus is. Salvation is not an event. It is not a miracle that rescues us from pain. Salvation is a relationship. It is an intimate, true and trusting loving of God. It has nothing to do with circumstances. Are you rolling in clover? **Great.** But how is your relationship with God? Are you in the midst of an excruciating pain and disease? **Terrible.** But how is your relationship with God?

And relationships are about loving commitments not logical convictions. We persist in relationships, not because they are logical and reasonable, but because we are committed to constructive connections that ground the very core of our being; that provide the hope for health, and growth into maturity; for our wholeness and our well-being.

The salvation of Jesus is not about miraculous changing of circumstances - climbing down off crosses, etc. The salvation of Jesus is about a relationship - God's relationship with us - that endures, survives and persists through all circumstances. And, I believe, brings us finally to Paradise - a final circumstance that ends all circumstances; and instead brings us finally, fully and freely into a relationship of healing, reconciliation, justice and lasting peace and joy.

Truth be told, many days I would much rather have the miracle, but that's not always an option! What God does offer is unending grace and love.

***Chant: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.***

### ***Prayers of Intercession***

Holy God, today we acknowledge you as King of Glory and Prince of Peace,

We pray for your church across the world, especially where it is difficult to worship you without fear of persecution. We pray for church leaders and all who lead in your name, thinking locally of our bishops: Stephen, Karen and Andrew and those who minister across the Bride Valley: Jane, Liz, Sue, Ryder, James, Heather, Paul and Vicky.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer,**

We give you thanks Lord, in particular for the excellent evensong last Sunday at Litton Cheney, for the successful coffee morning, also at St Mary's Church and for all our treasurers across the

whole Valley, for their hard work and dedication. We pray that you will bring us a suitable treasurer for the Benefice soon.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer,**

We pray for peace in our world, that those in authority may have the wisdom and guidance that comes directly from you, put an end we pray, to the death and destruction of war. We particularly pray for our brothers and sisters in South Sudan and in particular, Bishop Rufus and Mama Remi. For the South Sudan Medical Link, we pray for the resources needed.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer,**

As it is safeguarding Sunday we are prompted to pray that our churches may be places of welcome, security and compassion. Keep us watchful yet caring, trusting yet ready to question, that all who worship here with us may do so in safety and in the knowledge of your love; we pray for our Diocesan Safeguarding Team, for our Benefice Safeguarding Officer, Les Keatley and all our Parish Safeguarding Officers.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer,**

We pray for those in our community who are feeling isolated and lonely, for those young people who are on the verge of leaving care, or have just left. We remember those struggling with the rising cost of living. Help us to be alert to where we can help.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer,**

We remember the families of those who have recently died, including *Elfrida Savigear, Richard Hindson* and *baby Arlo* as they prepare for the funeral of their loved ones in the coming weeks. Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

### ***Final Hymn: King of kings, majesty***

1 King of kings, majesty,  
God of heaven living in me,  
gentle Saviour, closest friend,  
strong deliverer, beginning and end,  
all within me falls at your throne.

*Your majesty, I can but bow,  
I lay my all before you now.  
In royal robes I don't deserve  
I live to serve your majesty,  
I live to serve your majesty.*

2 Earth and heaven worship you,  
love eternal, faithful and true,  
who bought the nations, ransomed souls,  
brought this sinner near to your throne;  
all within me cries out in praise.

*Chorus*

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### ***Final Prayer and Blessing:***

May the doors of our churches be wide enough to receive all who come seeking God and fellowship.  
May the doors of our churches be narrow enough to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and enmity.  
May the threshold of our churches be no stumbling block to young or frail feet.  
May the threshold of our churches be too high to admit complacency and self-seeking.  
May our churches be, for all who enter, physically and on the telephone, a safe place and the doorway to a richer life in Christ.  
And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love and pray for, now and forevermore. Amen.