Reign of Christ - Sunday November 22nd, 2026
The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Psalm 100

Leader: O be joyful in the Lord, all the earth;
All: serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song.

Know that the Lord is God;
it is he that has made us and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and bless his name.

For the Lord is gracious; his steadfast love is everlasting,
and his faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

Gathering prayer

Gracious God, our hearts are warmed in your presence. We know you are without beginning or end. In days where we are constantly reminded of our mortality, when beliefs are quoted angrily and discernment is before us with far reaching consequences, remind us again - that your reign is eternal and your creative love the energy behind all that is, and still you reveal your power in the most powerless and vulnerable manner. In Jesus you gave the world a new understanding of power. With gratitude and full of wondering awe we worship you and seek your ways. Amen

Acknowledging

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

The Ancient of Days breathed life into this land and her peoples. From time beyond our reckoning the *(please name the people on whose land you gather)* People, the Traditional Custodians, have blessed this place through their law and customs, their care and life. We pay respects to their Elders and leaders past and present, and pray for the future of their communities. May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

Singing - Here in this place new light is streaming (TIS 474)

OR: Bring many names (TIS 182)
OR: Halle, halle, hallelujah (TIS 720)



Prayer

God, with your Spirit encouraging us and with Jesus love to guide us, we worship you with enthusiasm born of love. We join our voices with the millions who today praise Jesus, from every nation, and with the great host of heavenly souls whose praise and love fills the universe, all time and space.

With the confidence of your loving grace enfolding each one, we open our lives to your mercy and your healing help. You Lord seek the lost and we too often have not noticed losing our direction, our confidence, our faith, our way.

(pause for quiet prayer)

Comfortable with the many blessings you have given us, we often lose sight of the reality that you are the champion of the weak, the injured, the vulnerable, the lost.

(pause)

We sometimes, with pride, call ourselves your church but sadly know that in this body we sometimes look past the stranger, the hungry, the naked, the sick, those in prison.

(pause)

We call Christ our King, but too often we are reluctant to let you shepherd our lives.
Save us Lord from the unhealthy ways we selfishly hold onto. Save us Gracious God from our entanglement with the web of greed and self-interest that fuels our societies' idolatry of growth.

(pause)

Remind us, gracious God in the fibre of our being, the good news is; our Lord rescues us from wherever we scatter ourselves.

The good news is this: In Jesus Christ we are sought, we are found, we are forgiven and renewed. **Thanks be to God!**

Passing the peace

May the Peace of God dwell with you:
and also with you.

Listening

Read: Ezekiel 34: 11-24 &
Matthew 25: 31-46

For these words of faith
and for Jesus the Word
Thanks be to God.

Reflecting - Rev. Anneke Oppewal

The world the texts from Ezekiel and Matthew are conceived in is no happy, carefree and lovely place. It is a world where everything has fallen apart, a world full of displaced, disoriented people, a world filled with terror and fear. A world where the mighty have shown their muscle, and ordinary people have been left lost and without hope.

Ezekiel's is a situation of exile, of displacement, of mismanagement and failed leadership, of the poor falling victim to the greed and cold-hearted egocentricity of the rich. The Babylonians have come and taken the people from their homes and country to a place far away, with their own leaders ruining the country even before this happened, failing to rule with justice and compassion, their decisions self-serving and opportunistic.

The context in which Matthew's gospel was conceived is also one of exile, displacement, destruction, ruin, mismanagement, and self-serving opportunism of the leadership, resulting in persecution and suffering for their people. When Matthew writes his gospel, the temple has just been destroyed, the Jewish nation is no more, and many of its inhabitants have fled to just about every corner of the known world.

Ezekiel speaks about judgement on those who have abused their power and failed God's people in their leadership. And promises that those who have not been good shepherds to their people will have no future - that God will come with peace and abundant care to lead and put an end to the suffering of God's people.

In the gospel Jesus identifies himself as that leader, the leader that has come to be a good shepherd to God's people and put an end to injustice and suffering. He says:

"When the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne"*.

That throne is not a throne made of gold and covered in precious stones, but a cross. The one that comes to embody the good shepherd leader Ezekiel and other texts talked about, a king that has died suffering injustice, with the marks of his death on the cross still showing in his hands, side and feet.

When this resurrected, living Jesus returns to the world that crucified him, Matthew tells us, sheep are separated from goats. A clear distinction gets made between those who are with him and those who are not, imagery that is very similar to the imagery used in Ezekiel, where sheep are

separated from sheep and goats from goats. One from the other. Telling us that where God's leadership becomes embodied in the world, it becomes clear who is in and who is outside the circle of God's light.

The lost, the strays, the injured, the sick, they are brought to God's side to be healed, fed and nourished, while those who have harmed and abused them are judged and sent away.

Matthew speaks of judgement and eternal punishment for those who have abused their power and, in their greed, have brought harm to those that they could have cared for. They find themselves outside the circle of light, outside the parameters that define good leadership, informed by the qualities that the scriptures deem necessary for eternal life to take shape. Not only in a heaven in some distant future, but here and now as this shepherd with his crown of thorns takes his place on the throne

What both Ezekiel and Matthew testify to is that God is with those who suffer, comes to be with and looks after those who are at the receiving end of injustice and abuse, while those who cause their suffering will find themselves in a life that will prove not to have eternal value in the end. In the end the bible tells us, only the life of those who look after Jesus' family, who feed the hungry, cure the sick, and clothe the naked, is the life that has eternal value, eternal quality, and is fulfilled and fulfilling not only in the far future or outside time, but here and now.

To be committed to following in Jesus' footsteps and looking for his kind of glory is about embracing the suffering of this world and taking it into ourselves and transforming it for the least of these that suffer - to bring justice and a different kind of life experience to the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the naked and the prisoners of this world. Not with a view to earn some well-deserved five-star eternal holiday at the end of it, but to live a life of eternal value in the here and now, creating a world ruled by those values here and now, aiming at overthrowing the Kings of this world with the rule of a different King, the servant King, here and now. The good life a life that is fulfilling and fulfilled with healing and wholesome love and compassion that is out to create a different future, here and now.

* *New English Translation*

Singing - When I needed a neigbour TIS 629

OR: Lord hear my praying (TIS 689)
OR: All the sleepy should have a place to sleep (TIS 697)

Offering

Bless these offerings, shepherd God, that all who are hungry for you, thirsty for life, lonely, naked or sick may know the abundance of your love. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Notices

November 25 is the *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.*
November 29 is the *International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.*

Prayers for World & Community

O God, we sense your presence in the quiet of the morning; as light dispels the darkness, rolling over hilltops, making form and contrast where gloom and shadow had been.

We see you in the faces that smile with love into ours. We recognise you in the tang of the sea and in the countless grains of sand; you are all around us, you are deep within us. We bathe in your presence and praise you for your unfathomable goodness.

But we know there are still too many shadows across the hills of human troubles; and not just in the least of these, but in us all we recognise your presence calling us to prayer and action:

Your people are helpless, homeless and heartsick; your children cry in the shells of shattered homes, and still the world pours more money into making arms than holding hands; still our greed pollutes the earth,

still the consequences of our selfishness
reach out across generations.

Trinity of love, help us to see your face in the Rohingya, the Palestinian, the Sudanese and the Indigenous. Heal us so that we can become people of healing and renew us that we can be makers of peace.

Then give your encouragement and help to those who are struggling for justice and peace among nations and communities….

- give your wisdom and help to those who through research or hands-on care are fighting disease and suffering….

- give your strength and blessing to those who are trying to govern wisely, and to those who administer justice…

- give endurance and compassion to those who care for the unemployed, handicapped, the refugee and the homeless...

- assist all those who in spite of the help that is offered are still finding it hard to cope.

- give your renewing grace to those we know in great need …

Loving God, friend of all, in your love help us also to be light enough that your mercy and peace might show the way. In the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray together:

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Singing - The great love of God (TIS 164)

OR: This is a day of new beginnings (TIS 653)

Blessing

We go as the sisters and brothers of a servant who reigns as no other does.
Christ who is head of all things, yet gave his all and became servant of all.
May our faith be bold enough to learn from his ways, and to be at home in the presence of his humble Spirit.

Go blessed because;
the grace of Jesus Christ enfolds you,
the love of God is your unfailing resource,
and the fellowship of the Spirit
is your companion and your joy always.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
in the name of Christ. Amen

<u>Reflection:</u> Rev. Anneke Oppewal
Presbytery of Port Philip East

<u>Liturgy:</u> Rev. Ian Brown
Warragul

<u>Editor:</u> Rev. Arnie Wierenga
revarniewie@gmail.com