

November 22, 2020 + 10:30 A.M.

Christ the King/Thanksgiving

We Join in Worship

**PRELUDE** *Come, You Thankful People, Come* James Pethel

**\*THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

Christ's peace is with us always, no matter where we may be. And so, Christ's peace is with each and every one of us in this moment. Let us take it in. Let us really feel it. If able, please stand where you are, look around, and make signs of Christ's peace to each other.

**INTROIT** *Simple Gifts* Shaker Hymn, arr. Martha Lynn Thompson

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP** (Adapted from *Psalms* 95)

Leader: O come, let us ring to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

**ALL: Let us come into the LORD's presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to the LORD with songs of praise!**

Leader: For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

**ALL: In God's hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains belong to God also.**

Leader: The sea is our God's, for God made it, and the dry land, which God's hands have formed.

**ALL: O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For the LORD is our God, and we are the people of the LORD's pasture, and the sheep of the LORD's hand.**

**INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

Leader: Our reading from *Ephesians* this morning states: "I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers." Together let us confess our need to be more expressive of our gratitude.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION** (unison)

**Sovereign God, we confess that we have been ungrateful in the face of the many blessings you pour out upon us. We get trapped in negativity and struggle to find our way out of it. We forget what a beautiful thing it is to wake up each day. We lose sight of the wonders of your Creation. We fail to appreciate the brilliance of your children. We live our lives as though they are chores to get through rather than gifts to enjoy. Help us to transform our negative attitudes into attitudes of gratitude! In the name of your son Jesus Christ, our King, we pray. Amen.**

**KYRIE** (Instrumental)

**ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

Leader: Friends, hear the good news! God put God's power to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated him at God's 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. It is this Christ, full of power, who forgives us!

**ALL: Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!**

**GLORIA PATRI:** (Instrumental)

**STATEMENT OF FAITH:** (From *A Brief Statement of Faith*)

**In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

<b>We Hear God's Word</b>
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**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**Almighty God, in you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your Word; and give us grace that we may clearly understand and freely choose the way of your wisdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**HEBREW BIBLE LESSON:**            *Ezekiel 34:11-16*

**EPISTLE LESSON:**                *Ephesians 1:15-23*

**GOSPEL LESSON:**                *Matthew 25:31-46*

**SERMON:**                            The King of Love

**MEDITATION MUSIC**    *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*                    Dale Wood

**COMMITMENT OFFERING**

**ANTHEM**    *Give Thanks*                    Henry Smith/Patricia Sanders Cora

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**LORD'S PRAYER**

**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, forever. Amen.**

**OFFERTORY**

*Jesus Medley*                    Naida Hearn & Robert Cull/Setting by Patricia Sanders Cota

**OFFERING INVITATION:**

Leader:            Christ is the good and gracious King of Love. Let us give our tithes and offerings in recognition of his kingship. If you are worshiping here today, you can place your offering in the plate as you leave. If you are worshiping remotely, I encourage you to mail in checks or take advantage of our online giving options through the website. Now let us take a moment to reflect on stewardship.

## DOXOLOGY (Instrumental)

### PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (Unison)

**Sovereign God, we dedicate these gifts to you and your Kingdom. Guide us as you guided the Israelites through the wilderness. Help us to share your presence. We pray in the name of your son Jesus Christ, our King. Amen.**

<b>We Go Into the World</b>
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### BENEDICTION

### CHORAL RESPONSE

*Hymn of Promise*

Natalie Sleeth/Arr. Martha Lynn Thompson

**POSTLUDE** *Lead On, O King Eternal*

Edward Broughton

*\*The flowers in the chancel today are given by Elwyn and Caroline Studer in celebration of their 78<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on November 26<sup>th</sup>.*

<b>Life of the Church</b>
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### Announcements

- **YOUTH CONNECTIONS** will participate in the hanging of the greens immediately after the worship service today. We will also be enjoying pizza!
- **BRING YOUR OWN BIBLE** Our virtual study will take a break during Thanksgiving week and resume the following week.
- **POINSETTIA ORDERS** need to be submitted to the office by December 1, 2020. If you make an order, we will arrange a time for you to retrieve your flowers. Order forms are in the narthex and in November's Larger View.
- **RETURN TO ALL REMOTE WORSHIP** With the recent rapid spike in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Lake County, the Session and Pastor Tyler have determined a need to suspend in-person worship until conditions improve. Starting Sunday, November 29, our worship services will be entirely remote. We will send out further information this coming week.
- **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING DECEMBER 13, 2020** We will be having a virtual congregational meeting on Sunday, December 13, 2020, at 11:30 AM CST. The purpose of this meeting is to finalize nominations for 2021. Details about how to participate will be forthcoming in the next couple of weeks.

### Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- **BLESSING BOX** Our Blessing Box has gained even more importance in this season of pandemic. Economic impacts are on the rise, and the most vulnerable in our midst are the most harmed. Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates on food items before donating them.
- **MITTEN TREE COLD WEATHER IS COMING!** Ministry of Mission is once again sponsoring our annual Mitten Tree from November 29<sup>th</sup> through December 20<sup>th</sup>. We need donations of gloves, mittens, hats and scarves. All donations will be divided among Highland Public Schools by their counselor as needs dictate. There will be a donation bin outside the church office. You can drop your items in the bin Monday through Thursday 8 to 11 AM. Thanks for your ongoing support.

**PRAYER LIST**

Anthony  
Alaina  
Marge Ashton  
Avery  
Bapst Family  
Barbara Nelson  
Brady Vanes  
Sonny Buono  
Ina Chappell  
Danielle  
Dave  
George Griner  
Guy  
Gracie Helmer  
Bill Holmes  
Daniel Litwicki  
Frank  
David Markley  
Tony Martinez  
Yvonne Suroviak and  
family

Jessica  
Janet Orem  
Sharon Orem  
Mildred  
Jill Muller  
Jeanne Nestor  
U. Chong  
Rodney  
Calvin Scott  
Jay Smith  
Bonita Sutton  
Steve & Melinda  
Gary Studer  
Tarsha  
Richard Terpstra  
Mattie Welch  
Cindy Waltz Family  
Laura Buono Domsic  
Susan Hanley  
Rhonda Penman

### **Ezekiel 34:11-16**

<sup>11</sup> For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup> I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

### **Ephesians 1:15-23**

<sup>15</sup> I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. <sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

## **Matthew 25:31-46**

<sup>31</sup> “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. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> 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; <sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> 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.’ <sup>37</sup> 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? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup> 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.’ <sup>41</sup> 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; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> 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.’ <sup>44</sup> 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?’ <sup>45</sup> 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.’ <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

## The King of Love

*Ezekiel 34:11-16; Psalm 95; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46*

Back in September our Session voted to become part of the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination's *Matthew 25* initiative. Hopefully you have seen a bit about this in the Larger View and other communication from the Church! As you have received information on this initiative, perhaps you have scratched your head a bit or shrugged and wondered, "What is this?" Well, you're in luck, because we are going to get into it!

The last two weeks we have had readings from *Matthew 25*. From two weeks ago you may recall the first passage in the chapter—the story of the bridesmaids and their lamps of oil and the urging that we should be prepared for the arrival of Jesus at any moment of any day. We can think of this as a call to congregational vitality, a call to be a community alive with love and joy at *all* times in our worship, in our service to the world, and in our life together. Last week we did a deep dive into the second passage of the chapter—that descriptive parable of resistance with the enslaved man burying Caesar's money and then only giving to Caesar exactly what belonged to Caesar. We can think of this call to resistance as a call to dismantle structural racism—the enduring legacy of white supremacy that led to our own country's sordid history of chattel slavery and our ongoing systems that give structural power and privilege to white people over and above people of color. We can also think of this call to resistance as a call to eradicate systemic poverty—a call to challenge the economic policies and realities that keep the majority of the world trapped in poverty while the Caesars continue to get richer and richer.

And now we have today's reading, the crowning jewel of this remarkable chapter providentially coming to us on Christ the King Sunday. In this final passage of the chapter, we hear a prophecy of the Son of Man coming with the angels to sit upon the kingly throne of glory. It is an image of breathtaking power. Seated upon the throne of glory is the King of all the universes, the very Son of God and Son of Man. Surrounding him are all the angels of heaven, waiting upon him and standing prepared to do his bidding. And before him are gathered all the nations of the world, all the people of the earth. Really, you don't get any more immense or powerful than that!

In this scene of such immense majesty, what does the King of all the universes do? Does he shake his scepter and demand obedience? No! Does he rattle his sabre and call for a conquering war? No! Does he beat his chest and brag and boast about his mighty deeds? No! Does he raise his goblet and command adoration from his subjects? No! So what does he do? He hearkens back to the image of the good shepherd—the image of a king most famously embodied by David, beloved of God—the image so beautifully rendered in today's passage from the prophet Ezekiel: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak." Yes, this is the King of the universes who sits on the throne of glory, waited upon by all the angels, speaking to the gathered billions: A good shepherd reaching out to his beloved sheep, calling them into the inheritance of a Father who loves them—the inheritance of the very Kingdom over which he was King, a Kingdom prepared for them from the very foundation of the world.

Picture it! The assembled billions from all the nations of the world gaze up at this mighty King seated upon this great throne of glory, waited upon by the very angels of God. And as he speaks, their collective jaws drop in consternation. In the immensity of it all and of all that he represented, how could his words make sense? "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.” HUH? How could this be? How could it be possible that this mightiest of sovereigns ushering in the end of the ages was hungry, was thirsty, was a stranger, was naked, was sick, was imprisoned?

In the passage, they dare to speak up. They dare to ask him directly about the source of their consternation. “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?” In short, “How could this have even been possible with a king such as you?” And in response that mighty King before them says the most astounding thing of all: “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.”

Maybe at this point their hearts are opened and they get it. Maybe they don’t. We gathered here for worship today should definitely get it, though! We should all recognize that this great King on his throne of glory is none other than Jesus son of Mary, stepson of Joseph, born in a barn out of wedlock to a teenaged mother, raised in an impoverished Palestinian village under the colonial rule of the Roman Empire. This is Jesus of Nazareth, rabbi to a motley crew of fisher people and day laborers, disempowered by their overlords because of their religion and race and class. This is Jesus the healer, who gently lays hands upon people with leprosy and hemorrhaging and blindness and lameness. This is Jesus the friend who spends his time with people possessed by demons and with people outcast because of their professions of sex work or tax collection and with people shamed because of their bodies and with people hated because of their gender and with people excluded because of their language or citizenship status or migration history. This is Jesus the criminal, imprisoned by the Empire, tortured by soldiers, crucified alongside of other prisoners. This is Jesus the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, cousin brother of John, beloved chosen family of Martha and Mary and Lazarus. This is Jesus who lived, who laughed, who loved, who lost. When did we see him hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned, a stranger? That was his life!

When the King upon that throne of glory speaks of “the least of these,” he does not do so pejoratively as we so often interpret it. He does not create a hierarchy and designate a bottom group upon whom he can look down. Rather, he speaks as somebody who has lived as one of “the least of these.” He speaks as somebody who does not just claim “the least of these” as family but who knows with the fullness of his heart that “the least of these” *are* his family indeed. And when he speaks of “the least of these,” he speaks with a deep understanding of the way the powers and principalities of this world have always functioned, the ways of the Pharaohs and the Caesars and the slave masters as we discussed last week. He understands that the powers and principalities of this world function and thrive on systems and structures of evil—systems and structures that enact constant violence by maintaining economics that keep people in poverty and drawing red lines that keep people segregated and enacting policies that keep people from health and building walls that keep people out and locking bars that keep people trapped inside. In short, the powers and principalities function and thrive on creating and maintaining the category of “the least of these”—those people who do not have structural power within the system. And so, “the least of these” are the loved ones, the family of Jesus of Nazareth. “The least of these” *is* Jesus of Nazareth. “The least of these” is the great King of the universes.

How’s that for a paradigm shift? A complete inversion of the norms and rules of the world! A redefinition of what it means to reign with power! For, this King’s power is in his identity as one of “the least of these!” This King’s power is in his ability to connect, to understand, to know, and so to love. This King’s power is in his willingness to give up everything this life has to offer, to give up very life itself for the people. And this King’s



power is in the people's ability to connect to *him*, to understand *him*, to know *him*, and so to love *him*. Sure they can look up at the throne of glory in awe and wonder. Sure *we* can look up at the throne of glory in awe and wonder. But we can also look back down and look all around. We can look at each other. We can look especially at the hungry, at the thirsty, at the stranger, at the naked, at the sick, at the imprisoned—and see the kings and queens of the cosmos, the royalty of the universes.

Friends, this is the call of *Matthew 25*. It is the call to flip paradigms and so to dismantle the systems and structures of evil that dominate this world. It is the call to see royalty where the powers and principalities see “the least of these.” It is the call to feed, to quench, to welcome, to clothe, to care, to heal, to visit, to liberate, to connect, to join—in short, to love! It is the call to follow a King who dedicated his life, his death, and his resurrection to this same love. It is the call to follow a King who was hungry, who was thirsty, who was a stranger, who was naked, who was sick, who was imprisoned. It is the call to follow the King of the universes, seated upon the throne of glory upon whom all the angels wait and for whom all the nations bow. It is the call to follow the King who is “the least of these.” It is the call to follow the King of Love. So, come. Will you join me? Amen.