

financially and with economic forces outside of their control. We also remember those who are sick in our hospitals and at home. We pray that you would strengthen those who care.

Finally we pray for ourselves and ask that you would enlarge our hearts to embrace those who are difficult to love as well as those who are easy. Help us to give generously to others as you have always given generously to us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, our Lord and our King. **Amen.**

Father God, grant us grace for all we meet;
Brother Jesus, walk with us and by your nail
scarred hands point out the pain of the world;
Sister Spirit, by your wisdom teach us to respond
with kindness, love and gratitude, for we are
but stewards of the rich resources of your creation. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father...

Hymn [StF 319](#) **'Christ triumphant ever reigning'**

Blessing

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and
always, Amen.**

*Worship at home compiled by Revd. David Godfrey, Superintendent of the
Middlesbrough and Eston Circuit.*

Worship at Home Darlington District 22nd November 2020

Gathering Words

We have been called into the pastures of God,
where there is nurture, a place to rest,
safety, and kindness among all,
Let us draw near, in the goodness of God,
to be with each other,
and to praise the shepherd who has gathered us here. **Amen.**
(Taken from 'Roots for Churches Ltd')

Hymn [StF 328](#) **'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun'**

A prayer of confession

Truly we say to you that we have seen the broken
and have not been moved to compassion.
Truly we say to you that we have heard people mourning
and have not given them our time.
Truly we say to you that we have witnessed oppression
and have not raised our voices.
Truly we say to you that we have seen the stranger
and not said a word.
God, hiding in all strangers, all around us, we are truly sorry for
what we have done, and what we have not done. And we ask you
to deepen your welcome in us, so that we might deepen our
welcome around us. **Amen.**

(Taken from 'Roots for Churches Ltd')

Words of assurance (From Psalm 51)

God does not despise a broken and contrite heart. God creates in
us a clean heart and puts a new and right spirit within us. Thanks
be to God. Amen.

Reading [Matthew 25:31-46](#)

Reflection

The feast of Christ the King was first established in the Roman Catholic calendar in 1925. Initially celebrated on the last Sunday in October, it was moved in 1969 to the Sunday before advent as a fitting end to the liturgical year. Many protestant churches also celebrate the feast this Sunday. It is therefore no surprise to find in our gospel reading a picture of Jesus, the Son of Man, seated on his throne in glory, bringing kingly justice to all the nations of the earth.

The idea of someone sitting in judgement over us does not sit easily in twenty first century minds and in Matthew's gospel the justice dispensed is harsh indeed. The guilty ones in this story are commanded by God to, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire...". And the crime that has led to this punishment? We may expect it to be something unspeakably evil and wicked such as violence, torture or even murder. But no! To the surprise of those who were judged, their crime is not about what they have done, but about what they didn't do. They are being punished because they did nothing to help.

Methodist local preachers are always taught to interpret a passage of scripture by looking at the scripture that comes just before and just after the passage in question. In this case there are three lengthy sections of Jesus teaching in Matthew's gospel immediately before this one. In the first, Jesus tells his followers to remain faithful. In the second (chapter 25) he tells them to be prepared and in the third, he exhorts them to take risks in investing their talents. But in none of this teaching does Jesus say what this means in practice. Until now! In the story of the sheep and the goats we learn that being faithful means giving the hungry something to eat and the thirsty something to drink. We learn that being prepared

means welcoming strangers and clothing the naked. We also learn that investing our talents means looking after the sick and visiting prisoners. To borrow a phrase of Jesus, this is what "the kingdom of heaven is like".

But perhaps the most surprising thing about this teaching is still to come. Those who faithfully live the kingdom of heaven here on earth discover to their amazement that Jesus Christ is here too. He is to be found in the faces of the hungry and thirsty; in the faces of strangers and in those who have nothing; and in the faces of prisoners and those who are sick. When we welcome broken humanity we welcome him. Or to put it another way, the closer we get to those in need, the closer we grow to Christ. This is the wonderful news we share as God's people and the mystery we explore together. We serve a glorious king who is especially close to those who live fractured and broken lives. As we reach out to others in faith and love, may we grasp hold of Christ himself and know the joy of his kingdom.

Hymn [StF 335](#) **'Rejoice the Lord is King'**

Intercessions

Christ our King, in your kingdom the hungry and thirsty are given food and drink, strangers are welcomed, the naked are clothed, the sick are healed and prisoners are freed. May your church work in unity for the realisation of your kingdom here on earth.

We pray for the leaders of the nations, that they may govern for the good of all and not just for the benefit of the rich and powerful. May they listen to the powerless and those whose voices are often ignored and work for peace in your world.

We pray for our own communities at this time of epidemic and uncertainty. We especially remember those who are struggling