

Prelude: an arrangement of the hymn-tune ‘Wareham’ by C S Lang, played by John Crombie

Words of welcome: When we come into God’s presence we come into the court of the king of kings. And we find that we are welcome there, because the king of kings is also our Father God, and the shepherd of our souls. So we worship God with this paraphrase of Psalm 23:

Hymn: The King of love my shepherd is

Prayer:

Lord God, who is the king of love and the shepherd of our lives, we come to you just now to tell of our love and wonder. We worship you for being the one true God who never needs to put yourself into the limelight but is happy to work with the humblest part of your creation. And we know ourselves to be that humblest part. We were made to be like you, the crown of creation, but have so fallen from that position that sometimes it is hard to see the mage of your love and compassion, your generosity and grace in us and in our institutions.

Forgive us where we go so wrong and restore your image in us, so that we may show you to a watching world in all your humility and love.

And hear us as we pray now as Jesus taught us, saying:

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 the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

Next Sunday sees the beginning of Advent – already. And so it sees the start of the Church year, which begins with a small glimmer of light before building to the joy of Christmas and the radiance of Easter. After Easter we celebrate Pentecost, the glowing warmth of the Spirit’s coming among us, and then we have months of getting on with living in the light of Christ’s coming, his dying and rising and the coming of the Spirit. Some churches call this ordinary time, but of course the fact that it comes on the back of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost should tell us that no time is ever ordinary any more. All of time is imbued with the presence of God who comes to us in Christ and by his Spirit and who never leaves us.

This, the last Sunday before Advent is sometimes known as the Sunday of Christ the King. But all days belong to Christ the King really.

Today we are reading a story which is the tale of two people who were beyond hope in this world in different ways, and how their interactions with Jesus changed that. In this story as much as in any other of the stories of Jesus, we see what kind of a king he is and what kind of followers he therefore wants us to be.

Readings: Mark 5:21-43

Jesus is back in his own context, having crossed the sea of Galilee yet again. He is by the shore and the expected crowd has gathered. And to him came a man in extremis, a man who was at the end of hope. He is a ruler of the synagogue, so one of those who is used to having things go more or less his own way, used to be in charge of a situation, used to having others honour him. And he comes and falls at Jesus’ feet. He doesn’t request a private audience, he

doesn't even stand and talk to Jesus man-to-man, but in public he humbles himself because this is the last chance he can think of for his beloved daughter.

And which of us would not do the same for our children? Which of us would not take on schoolteachers or playground bullies, or their parents to protect and help our children? Or which of us would not take a sick child any distance, if at the end of the journey there might be someone who would cure them? The love we bear our children can drive us to put aside our own pride or convenience, if we can help them in their way through life. Many of us can see ourselves in Jairus' shoes.

And so Jesus went with him. And so did the crowd.

And in that crowd there was a woman who was also at the end of hope. A woman who had tried this and that, had spent all she had looking for a cure for the bleeding which no one could cure her of; bleeding which, in that culture, would render her unclean and unfit for society, would keep her an outcast, much as those with leprosy were outcast. She shouldn't have been in that crowd, strictly speaking. She shouldn't have been mingling with so many people, touching and being touched by them. She should have been practicing extreme social distancing, you might say. But she was at the end of hope and what did that matter? In the eye of ritual law she was spreading her uncleanness to everyone she touched.

And she touched Jesus.

All sorts of people were touching Jesus, were jostling him, coming up against him and moving away as the crowd surged along the road to Jairus' house. Some of them would know where they were going, know where Jairus lived, and have gone ahead. Others would want to be as close to the famous prophet as possible. But when the nameless woman touched him he knew it, he knew that this was not just a jostle, but a deliberate reaching out for hope and for healing.

Both the woman and Jairus showed humility as they came to Jesus in their need. If you are at the end of hope, if you fear that your case is hopeless, you will not stand up and loudly demand, but will humbly beg. In the woman's case she was so humble that she didn't even try to get Jesus' attention. And Jesus has time for those who are at the end of hope. He has time for those who do not make demands but humbly make requests, or simply seek to be near him for relief. It doesn't matter what their position is or has been in the eyes of others: Jairus, was a respected man and the woman had probably had some wealth of her own before she had spent it on useless cures. But when they came to Jesus they came as suppliants. And for both of them there was good news.

We will pause there and listen to (or sing) a Psalm which is about needing God and longing and waiting. Psalm 130

Hymn: Up from the depths I cry to God

Jairus and the nameless woman (I do wish we knew her name) came to Jesus as suppliants, and Jesus had time for them. The woman did not ask for his time, but Jesus gave it to her anyway. She needed to know that in his eyes she was important, important enough to notice and speak with and whose faith he wanted to affirm. She needed to see that she was to Jesus as important as the ruler of the synagogue who was even now taking him to deal with his own crisis. She had crept up to him, ill and desperate. Now she was healed (and she knew she was healed, she felt better already) Jesus was not going to have her creep away again. If she did, only her body, but not her soul, would be healed. In the kingdom where Jesus is king, the humblest person is important, is most important. And Jesus has all the time there is to make sure that those who need not only healing, but affirmation receive it.

To Jairus and others it might look as though his stopping for a few minutes with the woman had caused the end of all hope for the sick girl. But in the kingdom where Jesus is king it is never too late. It wasn't too late for Jairus or his daughter, and it wasn't too late for the woman. Taking time for people is important in the kingdom where Jesus is king and rushing past people in need can never be part of its ethos.

This is good news. It is good news for those who are at the end of hope, and who have learned that the world does not think them of great importance. That might be any of us at times, but for some people it is true all the time. And in the kingdom where Jesus is king, which includes the church and includes the lives of those who follow him, it is never all right to rush by and dismiss people. Hurry is the antithesis of the kingdom's ethos. Busyness that means that we do not have time for people could even be described as blasphemy.

That is a real challenge to those of us who would live in God's kingdom, because we are also living in a world where busyness is exalted, because it proves that we are worth something. But Jesus says that we are worth not being too busy for. We are worth spending time on and with. And so we are also called to model that in how we treat the people who come our way: people who need to know that they are noticed; people who need to know that there is hope no matter what their trouble.

Next week we will pass into Advent, which, of course leads up to Christmas. Sometimes that can be a really busy time in the church. This year there are things we have planned – not the usual things! We have planned to make Advent an opportunity to give to our community: to give hope and light in darkness, to give practically where there is need. May we also make it a time when we give of ourselves in time spent with those who come our way, never allowing ourselves to become so busy with inessentials that we fail to see the face of Jesus in every person that we encounter.

In the kingdom where Jesus is King there is time and there is care and because there is time and care, there is hope.

Hymn: We lay our broken world

Prayer:

Lord God, who in Jesus showed yourself to be the great healer, we lay our broken and hurting world before you. We see the hurt of the world writ large in news stories and brought near in the situations we live through and the people we know.

Bring your healing presence to your hurting world and to the hurting people in it.

Bring your healing presence through your children, your servants, your Church.

Bring your healing presence in the way that your people are with one another and with those around us: gentle, kind, compassionate, generous of ourselves and our time, giving and forgiving.

We lift to you those who are ill from the COVID virus and those who care for them. We lift to you our country with so many people living with restrictions far greater than we know. And we lift to you those who find the restrictions worse than any fear of illness.

Help us to be those who find our hope in you, in your love and your presence and reassurance. Help us to be those who spend time wisely, with you and with others, and find your peace to give to the world.

We pray for other churches and our Christian brothers and sisters who live with similar challenges to ours, remembering especially the churches of this presbytery and our brothers

and sisters in Libis and Kostalek. And we offer our prayers to you in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

Hymn: Blessing and honour and glory and power

Benediction:

Living in the kingdom where Jesus is king and following the prince of peace,
Be at peace.

And the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.

Postlude: Widor Toccata played by Alan Buchan