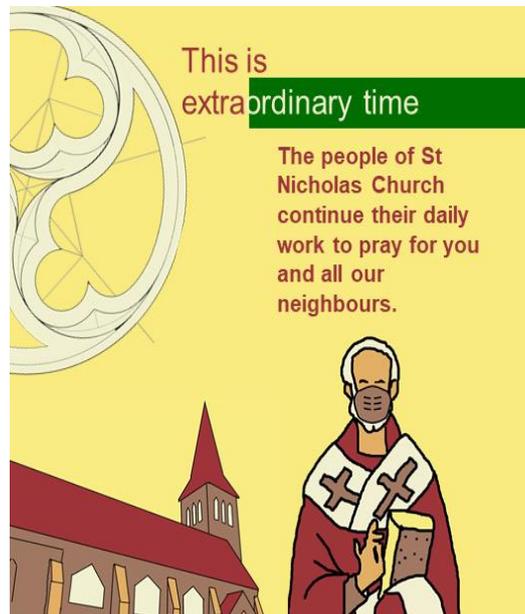


**Worship at St. Nicholas, Sutton  
for Christ the King, Sunday next before Advent, 22 November 2020  
Collect, hymns, readings & sermon**



Please join me for our service at 10.30am today (or at another convenient time) by following the Order of Service and singing in your own home. I will be thinking of you all and praying for you at The Rectory at the same time and longing for our future reunion in Church.

*Frances*

Revd Frances Arnold, Priest-in-Charge

**Collect** (prayer of the week)

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.**

**Hymns**

Opening *Ye watchers and ye holy ones*

Gradual *When I needed a neighbour*

## Readings

**Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24**

*God the True Shepherd*

11 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.

20 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup>Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, <sup>22</sup>I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

23 I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup>And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

**Ephesians 1.15-end**

*Paul's Prayer*

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love\* towards 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.

31 '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.'

### **Sermon**

The parable of the sheep and the goats appears to be like a conventional morality tale. There are other texts from the time in which works of mercy are the deciding factor in judgement. For example, in the Jewish midrash (commentary on scripture) there is the striking image of a dead man boasting self-confidently about his good deeds. Typically though, Jesus puts a surprise into the parable. Those who have shown charity to the oppressed, the poor and the suffering are not aware of having helped. They have not kept a record of the good they have done and are surprised to find themselves among the saved.

The parable also stands out for what it reveals about Christ's kingship. The powerful (kings and rulers) will ultimately be held to account by him. The idea can already be found in the words of prophets like Ezekiel. He addresses the strong and powerful who have 'butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide.' God promises that he will judge the oppressors who failed to protect the poor: he will once again 'be the shepherd of my sheep.' In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus himself gives the assurance that unjust rulers will be held to account. The Son of Man will return in glory to judge 'all the nations.'

But the parable also makes it clear that Christ's kingship cannot be understood in terms of the world's understanding of status and power. Jesus declares himself more than a judge. He is present in each of those who are hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison. He identifies himself with the oppressed voluntarily by his crucifixion and death. The gospel reading comes immediately before the events leading to his Passion. In the verses that follow, Jesus is anointed in Bethany by an anonymous woman: in the same act, she anoints him on the head like a king and prepares him for his burial. The authority and sacrifice of Christ are closely connected.

On this feast of Christ the King, we are reminded both of his exalted status as the king of all creation and of his poverty. Our gospel reading calls us as a Church to recognise and serve Christ in all who are in need. Let us pray in the words of St Paul in the letter to the Ephesians that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know him, so that, with the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which he has called us...

**Amen.**