A sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist at Wells Cathedral, preached on Sunday 23 November 2025 by the Venerable Anne Gell, Archdeacon of Wells.

Christ the King

In church-speak this Sunday marks the end of our liturgical year. On Advent Sunday, a new year begins.

And in the course of our liturgical year, we have travelled together through the gospel. We have looked with expectation for the coming of Christ; we have knelt in adoration at the manger and joined our song with the angels. We have stood and wept at the foot of the cross, walked in the garden of resurrection joy and been with the disciples in the Upper Room as the Holy Spirit swept through. We have listened to Jesus' teaching, heard his parables and learnt of healings and miracles. And now in the last weeks of the year, our sights are turned towards the end times, to the time when 'Christ will come again in glory . . and his kingdom will have no end'.

These weeks of the Kingdom season through November have given us glimpses of the 'end times', some of them enigmatic, all of them challenging. At Evensong, our readings are from the vision-filled writings of the book of Daniel and of Revelation. Much that is puzzling, some of it extremely odd, but undoubtedly dramatic and a brave attempt to put into words that which is fundamentally impossible to express.

And so now, just before we come to the start of our new church year, and with some of these apocalyptic themes continuing in the early days of Advent, we come today to celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

The kingship of Christ holds together most wonderfully what we might call the extremes of Christ's divinity. The heights of divine majesty, Christ the King seated in glory, all things at his feet, utterly worthy of our praise, of the very best we can offer in worship and our devotion. Alongside this, the reality of his presence in the depths and brokenness of messy, desperate, human life. The servant king who knelt to wash his disciples' feet and whose divine reign is one of humility and service, of extravagant love and tender care. Kingdom love that we continue to see most powerfully in ordinary and yet extra-ordinary touches of divine grace in human lives; glimpses of the kingdom of Christ our king, here among us and still to come.

As you go home, do look up to see our own figure of Christ the King high up on the West Front and see, too, the close up image of that figure on the order of service. Notice that although he sits in glory, his is in many ways a humble figure, no crown nor fanfares, bare-chested, a simple cloak.

Notice too that he sits gazing outwards, away from the Cathedral and all that is here within, his attention towards wider Wells and beyond. Christ for the world. Looking one might wonder for the signs of his kingdom? A reminder of our own call to look outwards; to be there for those beyond the walls of our church and our faith. To do kingdom work in our every day. In kindness and compassion, in loving care for those in need, in acts of generosity, in words of peace, in care for creation.

These are some of the markers of kingdom living. For Charlie who comes today to be baptised and those who speak for him, this is the pattern we pray for your life, Charlie, as you grow to know and love Jesus Christ and to understand what it means to be a part of this family of faith.

Our two readings this morning help us to understand something of this full span of Christ's kingship.

In the reading from the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians we hear a most extraordinarily poetic and beautiful summary of who Christ is and of all that is done in him and through him. Every word reverberates with profound meaning.

'He is the image of the invisible God' – in him is nothing that is not of God. In seeing him we are given eyes to see the God whom otherwise we cannot see. In knowing him, the human mind and spirit are enabled to grasp something of the things of God.

'All things have been created through him and for him'. He is the one through whom everything that exists is. It is only through him that any kind of earthly power and kingship are created, and so it is only in him that we can see what the exercise of human power is intended to look like.

And I do wonder if in the world as it is today we are becoming almost immune to the wrong uses of power that we see around us. It has become the norm in so many ways and places. Authoritarian rather than authoritative; combative rather than cooperative, egotistical and greedy rather than with any sense of responsibility or of a common good.

Perhaps we might reflect on how we might notice these things better and how we might then call them out; and how too we might recognise our own power and use it wisely and well?

'He is the image of the invisible God . . all things have been created through him and for him.'

Turning to our Gospel reading, we might rightly be shocked to find the one who is the image of the invisible God hanging tortured and broken on a cross. The one in whom all power has its origin being betrayed, arrested and tried unjustly through abuse of that power. Tortured and then strung up like a common criminal between two others.

Although all four Gospels give account of the crucifixion, it is only in Luke that we hear Jesus' words of forgiveness for those who have put him there. It is only in Luke that we hear his promise of a place in Paradise to the thief next to him, the thief who in his dying agony glimpses something of who Christ is and the reality of his kingdom.

In Luke, the cross is seen clearly as the throne of a king who suffers alongside others, who experiences the worst of human depravity and darkness, and from that throne holds out the promises of his kingdom: forgiveness, restitution and hope.

This is the Christ we worship and adore. The Christ of whose presence we can be assured in our own times of pain or brokenness, who knows what it is to suffer, and to whom we can turn in trust, knowing that he longs to offer love and hope.

'Remember me Lord,' said the thief, 'when you come into your kingdom.'

And so we pray:

Remember us too, O Christ our King, open to us the gate of your glory. In the trials of life and in our times of joy; in our getting things wrong as well as in our faltering steps along your way open to us the treasures of your kingdom. Your hope, your light, your peace. Amen.

The Venerable Anne Gell, Archdeacon of Wells 23 November 2025