

**LAIRG CHURCH OF SCOTLAND & ROGART (ST CALLANS) CHURCH OF SCOTLAND**  
**SCO20871 and SCO10035**

**Call to worship**

As the darkness of winter draws in, as the coldest time of the year approaches, as we close our doors and turn up our heating,  
Come, Lord of light, come, God of the warm embrace, come to us, Immanuel, God with us. Amen.

**Hymn: At the name of Jesus**

1 At the name of Jesus ev'ry knee shall bow,  
ev'ry tongue confess him King of glory now.  
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

2 At his voice creation sprang at once to sight,  
all the angel faces, all the hosts of light,  
thrones and dominations, stars upon their way,  
all the heav'nly orders in their great array.

3 Humbled for a season to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,  
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,  
brought it back victorious, when from death he  
passed.

4 Bore it up triumphant with its human light,  
through all ranks of creatures to the central height;  
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast,  
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

5 In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue  
all that is not holy, all that is not true;  
He is God the Saviour, He is Christ the Lord,  
Ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored

6 Brothers, this Lord Jesus shall return again,  
with his Father's glory, with his angel train;  
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,  
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel, Michael Brierley  
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**Opening Prayers**

Almighty God: from the beginning of time to the end of eternity, you have chosen to use your power and majesty to love us, to redeem us, and to shape us as your people.

King of Kings and Lord of Lords: you became weak so that you could confront the strength of sin and death, confounding their ridicule with your resurrection.

Spirit of God, resting upon us: may your power enflame us with your peace,  
may your peace touch us with your grace;  
may your grace fill us with your hope;  
may your hope lead us into your Kingdom.

God in Community, Holy in One, may your word be on our lips, as we pray together as Jesus has taught us, saying,

**We say together the Lord's Prayer**

**Readings: Ephesians 1:15-23 Paul's Prayer**

<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 The Judgment of the Nations**

<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

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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, <sup>[a]</sup> 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.

### **Reflections on the readings**

Matthew 25 is all about preparedness. First of all, there are the foolish bridesmaids, who ran out of oil and so missed the wedding; then there is the slave who wasted his chance of increasing his one talent while the master was away, and now we have the sheep and the goats. All of these people and groups are unprepared for what is about to happen, and they face terrible consequences, for the stories are not just about the importance of being ready, but also about judgement. The people in the stories make their judgements. The foolish bridesmaids decide there is no great rush. The slave with one talent decides to do nothing, and the 'goats' decide that some people are not worth bothering about. God then makes his judgement and, unfortunately, it is completely different from theirs.

All the people standing at the throne of glory are taken aback by God's judgement and, more particularly, by God's judge. They were not expecting to see the Son of Man up there on the throne, looking completely at home, with angels around him carrying on as if they thought he was God. As the people are separated into two groups, one on the right hand and one on the left of this awesome yet recognizable figure, it is clear that both groups are equally puzzled. They are both, you might say, unprepared for this standard of judgement. Neither group had lived their lives expecting to have them judged by this Man, in this way. As their sentences are handed down, both groups say, 'We didn't know we would be judged for *that*.'

The judge does not explain himself, but he could have pointed to both the law and the prophets, which make it clear what God expects. The reading from Ezekiel, for example, shows God himself looking for the lost sheep and longing to care for them. It also shows God's judgement on those 'fat sheep' who kept the pasture for themselves, and deliberately pushed away the hungry and the needy. Any wellbrought-up Jew listening to Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats would recognize the justice of the judgement handed out to the goats. No one could say that they were not warned about the nature of God.

So how did they – and how do we – manage so to be deceived? How did we manage to persuade ourselves that there would be no real consequences for the way we live? As we gorge ourselves to death, how come we do not realize that we are the fat sheep, pushing the starving millions away from our green fields?

That is what makes the Son of Man such a terrible judge. Judgement is not something alien and distant, but something that bears the human face of the neglected, the tortured, the crucified. God is not far away, and not easy to deceive, and we cannot plead that we did not know what he wanted of us. We know perfectly well what the hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick and imprisoned people

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around us want. Jesus the Son of Man is to be our judge, and the human face he shows us is all too recognizable.

That is why Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that they might come to know Jesus Christ. On the face of it, Ephesians and the parable of the sheep and the goats could not be more different. The parable has often been read as meaning that you don't need to be religious to please God. Although the Judge in the story is Jesus, the King, the Son of Man, it is certainly true that the sheep didn't think they recognized him in those whom they helped. They did their good deeds without any ulterior motives, looking for no recognition. Whereas the knowledge of God that the Ephesians have sounds like theoretical knowledge, issuing in no particular kind of behaviour, and with the obvious hope of rich reward in heaven.

But if you look more closely, that is far from the truth. This 'knowledge' is the knowledge that God's revelation is to be found in the crucified Jesus, and that this human, suffering figure is the one who rules for God, and to whom all creation is subject. When we, his Church, acknowledge him as our King, and become his body, we can have no illusions about what that body looks like. We believe in God's great power, at work in Jesus, to bring life out of death. And so we, his body, work to bring life out of the death all around us. We work to pay attention to the real human beings with whom God came to identify, and we look around us for the life that created and redeemed out of love.

**Prayers of intercession – A God who cares**

God, who cares for us as a shepherd cares for the sheep, we come to you in our weakness, knowing that you will be our strength.

You have promised to seek the lost: so we bring before you all those who have lost direction in life, through bereavement, unemployment, family breakdown, stress, depression, or a lack of motivation or purpose. Some of us have experienced these situations for ourselves and we pray that you will lead us and all who are lost back into the safety of your love and care.

You have promised to bring back those who have strayed: so we bring to you all those who have been increasingly drawn into a life of crime, or drug abuse, or promiscuity; those who have followed the false gods of wealth, possessions and selfish living and those who have forgotten who you are. When we are tempted and stray from your path, forgive and bless us and draw back to you all those who have forgotten, or never knew, how fulfilling life can be following your direction and purpose.

You have promised to bind up the injured: so we bring to you all those who are broken in life by illness, disability, dementia, a life-threatening diagnosis, accident, famine, flood, earthquake, neglect, abuse, fear, or failure. Some people have to bear so much pain and many do not know where to turn for help, or comfort. Enfold us all in your love and surround us with your care and show us how we can be more aware of the ways that we can offer help and support.

You have promised to strengthen the weak: so we bring to you all those who feel that they have no control over anything that happens to them; those living in countries torn apart by war, or ruled with injustice; those bullied and beaten by powerful cowards: those who often feel that life is hardly worth living. When we feel as if life is spinning out of control and there is nothing we can do, remind us that we can rely on your strength to carry us and that we can offer that support to others as we do all we can to reach those who are in such desperate need.

Hold us, Lord, in your care and strengthen our trust in you we pray in Christ's name AMEN

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**Hymn: Brother, sister let me serve you**

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to  
let you be my servant too.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.

3. I will hold the Christlight for you  
in the night time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping;  
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow,  
till we've seen this journey through.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,  
we shall find such harmony,  
born of all we've known together  
of Christ's love and agony.

6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to  
let you be my servant too.

Richard Gillard  
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**Blessing**

We rise from this moment, inspired by your message Lord God.  
We go to welcome all people, to make space for all things,  
We go to do all that we can, in the name of love.  
And may God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit go with you as you leave this time of worship.  
Amen.