

Order of Worship for November 24, 2024 – Christ the King/Harvest Home Sunday

For personal transformation, we study God’s Word to learn how we shall live, offer praise, and worship and strengthen each other. For the transformation of the world, we make disciples.

CENTERING WORDS All human leaders will one day disappoint and fail us. Divine kingship alone is faithful.

SERVICE OF THE ACOLYTE – The Sanctuary Song *Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving I’ll be a living sanctuary for you.* (sing twice)

† CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Come, let us celebrate the goodness of God.

P: God has blessed us with God's great love.

L: Let us come to this time, letting go of our worries.

P: Let us come to this time praising God.

L: Come, now is the time to worship.

P: We come rejoicing, for God is so good to us.

† OPENING PRAYER

Sovereign God, you clothe your people in the garments of salvation, and you bless them with grace and peace. Open our eyes to the glory of your Son, who comes to rule with justice and reign with righteousness. Open our ears to the sound of his voice, and open our hearts to love as he loves, that we might shine like dew on the grass and dwell in Christ’s peace. AMEN.

† OPENING HYMN Majesty, Worship His Majesty UMH #176 (sing twice)

The Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the one who was and is and is to come, incites us to share our blessings with others, through the tithes and offerings we bring. Let us prepare to offer our gifts by first singing the doxology.

BLESSING OF GIFTS AND OFFERINGS – – DOXOLOGY *Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Loving Creator, whose reign is everlasting, we offer these gifts with grateful hearts. May they serve to proclaim your truth and extend your kingdom of justice, peace, and love. Transform our offerings and our lives to bear witness to the hope and promise of Christ, our king. In his holy name, we pray. Amen. (John 18:33-37)

JOYS AND CONCERNS - PASTORAL PRAYER (*The Lord's Prayer "trespass"*)

INTRO: From the first day of Advent, so long ago, we have come full circle to the celebration of the Reign of Christ, also known as Christ the King Sunday. We have witnessed the wonderful birth, the great healing moments, the teachings that have sustained people throughout the centuries. We cried in sorrow at the Crucifixion and rejoiced with absolute joy on the sunrise of Easter when Jesus conquered our greatest fear, death. We celebrated the great good news of the disciples as they risked everything to finally proclaim the good news to all people. Now on this Sunday, we invite Jesus to enter our hearts.

LET US PRAY Sovereign Lord Jesus, come into our hearts today and take your reign. Remind us that your kingdom is a kingdom of hope and light, in which there is no darkness, fear, or sadness. You have called us to be the Kingdom people, living our lives in the knowledge that peace, justice, and hope are not only possible, but can actually be the ruling factor of the world, for those who follow you. There are many who do not acknowledge your presence and your name, O Lord. But in your infinite love and mercy, you have acknowledged and claimed them. Help us to

be the kind of disciples that welcome everyone with the words of kindness, that offer acts of mercy and peace to all in need, to proclaim Christ risen and glorified. As we have brought before you, O Lord, the names of people and situations needing your healing and comforting touch, may we also open our hearts for that same healing and comfort. Remind us that we are never out of your grace and mercy. We know that you will give us the strength and wisdom to be true disciples and we celebrate and honor you, now and forever.

You call us to be people of prayer, let us share the words Jesus taught...

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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

PASSING THE PEACE OF CHRIST – ST. JAMES/SPRUCETOWN ONLY

HYMN OF PREPARATION Come, Ye Thankful People, Come UMH #694

Blessing of the Harvest Home donations:

Christ the King Sunday, also known as Reign of Christ Sunday is when we celebrate the reign of Jesus Christ over all creation. This year it coincides with Harvest Home, a time to reflect on the harvest of our labor, both physical and spiritual. We have been collecting for benefit of the food pantry ministry and will now offer prayer over the givers, the gifts and the receivers.

Let us pray: Gracious and Loving God, We come before You today with hearts full of gratitude for the abundance of Your provision and the generosity of this community. We thank You for the gifts brought before us—the food and sustenance that will nourish bodies and uplift spirits. Just as You fed the multitudes with loaves and fish, may these offerings be multiplied by Your grace to feed those in need within our community. We ask Your blessing over the givers, who have opened their hearts and hands to share what they have received. May they continue to experience the joy of giving, knowing that through their generosity, they are fulfilling Your call to love and serve their neighbors. Enrich their lives with Your presence, and may they never want for anything, as You are their Provider. Bless the gifts themselves, O Lord. Sanctify this food, that it may nourish those who receive it. Let it be more than mere sustenance but a sign of Your compassion and care. May it strengthen weary bodies, lift heavy hearts, and remind all who partake that they are loved and not forgotten.

We especially pray for those who will receive these gifts. You know their needs, both spoken and unspoken. May this food be a source of hope, comfort, and reassurance that You are with them, even in times of hardship. May Your Spirit move within them, drawing them closer to Your love and provision. As we place our hands to the plow, help us to continue sowing seeds of kindness, generosity, and faith, knowing that in due season, we will reap a harvest of righteousness. Bless this Harvest Home ministry and all who are touched by these offerings. We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, our King. **Amen.**

SELECTED SCRIPTURE John 18:33-37 // Revelation 1:4-8 // Matthew 9:35-38 // Luke 9:57-62

If you've received email or letters from me you know that I typically close not with "sincerely yours" but with hands to the plow. Friends who were missionaries in PNG used that snippet of scripture to encapsulate their ministry of going into places where people did not know Jesus, preparing that field to sowing seeds to bring about a harvest. I wanted to help bring something out of this world into this world, if God would permit it. According to John 18:36, Christ's

kingdom is not of this world, but it is a kingdom that is breaking into this world through the hands, hearts, and lives of His followers.

The readings from Matthew, Luke, and John invite us to consider our role in this kingdom. What does it look like to have our “hands to the plow” for Christ? What does it mean to be workers in the harvest? How can we faithfully sow seeds for future harvest? Wherever we are on our discipleship path, which you are free to assess on your own, we can have an impact on this work. Which is why it’s so important to prayerfully consider from where we began the day we said, Jesus is my rock, my teacher, my example and I’m going to follow him, to now, how much closer are we to Jesus’ own example of living in the various ways you see on the circular grid, and where we may be right now in the other grid? Because when we know where we’ve been and where we are, we can better envision what our next step to pursue may be. What a great way to end our church year, and start the new! Where do you hope to see yourself on those grids at the end of our next church year? We also get to consider where the people in the passages we’re going to hear today may be on their path. We begin in

John 18:33-37 New American Standard Bible 1995

³³Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” ³⁴Jesus answered, “Are you saying this ^[a]on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” ³⁵Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” ³⁶Jesus answered, “My kingdom ^[b]is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not ^[c]of this realm.” ³⁷Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Revelation 1:4-8 New American Standard Bible 1995 **Message to the Seven Churches**

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who [a]is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins [b]by His blood— 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to [c]His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who [d]is to come, the Almighty.”

Matthew 9:35-38 New American Standard Bible 1995 **The Workers Are Few**

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Luke 9:57-62 New American Standard Bible 1995 **Exacting Discipleship**

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” 58 And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the [ai]air have [aj]nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” 59 And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” 60 But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” 61 Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” 62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

L: The Word of God for the People of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

MESSAGE Hands to the Plow: Mission and Ministry into the Harvest

The powerful metaphor Jesus uses when He speaks about the “hands to the plow” in Luke 9:62 calls us to a life of discipleship and mission, where we set our hands to the Word of God—our plow—and move forward in His service without hesitation or looking back.

Taking the Plow—The Word of God

When Jesus talks about putting our hand to the plow, He is inviting us to take hold of something substantial. The plow is not a light or insignificant tool; it’s powerful and sharp, an instrument that cuts through all kinds of soil, preparing the ground for deep and effective sowing. In our spiritual journey, this plow is the Word of God. The Scriptures cut through the hardened, rocky, or thorny soils of our hearts and the world around us. Whether we face resistance, indifference, or distractions, the Word prepares us to be grounded in truth so that the seed of the gospel may take root.

John Wesley, in his sermon "The One Thing Needful," reminds us that God's Word is what shapes us into Christ's likeness. The plow, firmly held up in our hands and hearts connects to the deep wisdom of Scripture, so that as we are moving forward with it, we can be part of preparing the way for a harvest of righteousness. We can trust that the Word of God will do its work, breaking through all that stands in the way of new growth.

Balancing the Plow—Uplifting the Word

Once we take hold of the plow, we must learn to uplift it on balance. Farmers know that to keep their rows straight, they must maintain a steady, unwavering hand. If they lean too far in one direction, the furrows will go crooked. In our spiritual lives, the same principle applies. We must lift up the Word of God in our daily living, balancing it with godly wisdom and discernment. We cannot afford to be swayed by popular opinion or personal desires; instead, we must stay true to the balanced teachings of Scripture, keeping our rows straight and our focus on the kingdom that lies ahead.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, writes that we must be careful to hold onto the core of the Christian faith without adding or taking away from it. Like a farmer who stays true to his path, we are called to keep the Word of God front and center of our lives, avoiding extremes that would take us off course. When we balance the plow, we prepare for a harvest that will yield eternal fruit.

The Power Source—God's Strength

A plow is a powerful tool, but it requires a great power source to pull it forward. In the fields, it may be a team of oxen. For us, the power that pulls the plow, the Word of God is God. We hold on and follow. Hold on and follow. What do you think would happen if you tried to be the power source and push the plow? Doesn't work that way. We do not rely on our own strength to accomplish the work of the kingdom; instead, we are pulled forward by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 9 that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. When we pray for more workers, we are asking God to send those who are willing to be yoked to His strength, to follow His lead into the fields that are ripe for harvest.

John Wesley emphasized that our work in the kingdom must always be done in reliance upon God's grace. Without it, our efforts are in vain. The plow cannot move without the power that pulls it, and we cannot fulfill our mission without the divine power of God driving us forward on our personal discipleship pathway yoked to the Word of God.

The Danger of Looking Back

We heard how some were willing, but hesitant, they had things to attend to first. Pretty common today to see other things drawing souls away from church, becoming more important. Jesus' warning in Luke 9:62 is stark: "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." What does it mean to look back? In ancient farming, looking back while plowing would cause the rows to become crooked, ruining the entire planting. Spiritually, looking back means losing focus on Christ and the kingdom work we are called to pursue. It means being distracted by the past, by old habits, regrets, or comforts, and losing sight of the forward momentum and eternal impact we're called to.

C.S. Lewis speaks about the danger of being too attached to the world behind us. In his book *The Great Divorce*, he describes souls who refuse to move forward toward God because they cannot let go of their earthly attachments. Jesus calls us to keep our eyes fixed on Him, to follow His lead, and to trust that what lies ahead is far better than what we leave behind. The cost of discipleship may be high, but the reward is eternal life and the joy of participating in His harvest.

The Harvest—Made Possible by Hands to the Plow

When we put our hands to the plow and press forward in faith, trusting God to guide and empower us, the result is a harvest. The fields are white and ready, and God is calling workers into His harvest. As Jesus said in Matthew 9:38, we are to pray for more workers to enter the fields, for the task is great, but the workers are few. Each of us has a role to play in this harvest, whether by sowing seeds, nurturing new growth, or reaping the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of others.

John Wesley often spoke about the need for Christians to be active in spreading the gospel. He knew that the harvest required laborers who were not afraid to get their hands dirty, to enter the fields and do the hard work of ministry. The harvest is not something we wait for passively; it is something we are called to participate in actively, with our hands on the plow and our eyes fixed on the future God has prepared.

As we stand on the edge of this harvest season, let us consider anew the call to discipleship that Christ has placed on our lives. Let us put our hands to the plow—the Word of God—lifting it with balance, allowing God's strength to pull us forward, and never looking back. The fields are ready, and the time is now. May we, as Christ's workers, rise to the task with hearts full of faith and hands committed to the work ahead.

Let us pray:

Gracious and mighty God, We come before You today, grateful for Your Word that guides us and the strength that pulls us forward. As we take up the plow, help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, never looking back, and trusting in Your power to lead us. We pray for more workers in Your harvest fields, those with a call on their life to answer that call, and ask that You send us where we are needed most. Equip us to sow, to tend, and to reap for Your glory. Keep us balanced in Your truth, so that we may not stray from the path You've set before us. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

HYMN Bringing in the Sheaves (attached)

† COMMISSION AND BLESSING

Hold onto hope, for God is faith and true. The promise of love is ours, through the grace of Christ Jesus. And the power of the holy spirit! We are invited to stand up and put our hands to the plow taking our place in the work of sowing seed for Christ's sake. Until then...

Go into the world with hope, courageously face the struggles and joys of each day. Go forth in courage and faith knowing God goes with you. AMEN.

[Uplift the Word of God that cuts through all soils for seed's sake, and don't look back. The Author will bring about a harvest of righteousness for Kingdom's sake.]

Bringing in the Sheaves

Knowles Shaw, 1874

George A. Minor, 1880

$\text{♩} = 103$

1. Sow-ing in the morn-ing, sow-ing seeds of kind-ness, Sow - ing in the noon - tide
 2. Sow-ing in the sun - shine, sow-ing in the sha - dows, Fear - ing nei - ther clouds nor
 3. Go - ing forth with weep-ing, sow-ing for the Mas-ter, Though the loss sus - tained our

and the dew - y eve; Wait - ing for the har - vest, and the time of reap - ing,
 win - ter's chill - ing breeze; By and by the har - vest, and the la - bor end - ed,
 spir - it of - ten grieves; When our weep - ing's o - ver, He will bid us wel - come,

Refrain

We shall come re - joic - ing, bring - ing in the sheaves. Bring - ing in the sheaves,
 We shall come re - joic - ing, bring - ing in the sheaves. Bring - ing in the sheaves,
 We shall come re - joic - ing, bring - ing in the sheaves.

bring-ing in the sheaves, We shall come re - joic - ing, bring-ing in the sheaves, ing,

bring-ing in the sheaves,