



# Church in a Bag



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# 7 November

## A Gathering

Gentle Shepherd, King of Love, we come to you as we are, not as who we pretend to be.

The truth is, God, that when we lift our heads above our path, we discover ourselves lost in a maze of choices.

Were it not for you, O Lord, we would be lost forever.



But, because of You, we know Your love will seek us and finds us as we are, not as we pretend.

Be patient with us and teach us how to act upon Your great promise.

King of Love, lead us.

**Amen**

## Preparation

Consider these interesting questions once posed by Rev David Chadwell:

Who would you prefer for a next-door neighbour: a person of excellent habits or a person with a good heart?

Who would you prefer for a good friend: a person of excellent habits, or a person with a good heart?

Who would you prefer for a husband or a wife: a person of excellent habits, or a person with a good heart?

Who would you prefer for a child: a child with excellent habits, or a child with a good heart?

When you discuss good behaviour, you are discussing the quality of a person's self-control. When you discuss a good heart, you are discussing the quality of the person.



Jesus' response to this question is related to today's scripture readings. The stage is set to the day Jesus visits the Temple.

## Reading

**Mark 12:36-40**



## Reflection

*"Watch out for the teachers of the Law..."*

This is the first focus of today's Scripture. Pharisees and teachers have come down from Jerusalem and, interestingly, they are gathered around Jesus who is watching the disciples. The disciples, it seems, are eating lunch. They have come in from the day's work. Too tired and too hungry to care that their hands and faces are dirty, they immediately sit down to eat without washing.

The Pharisees seize upon this ceremonial oversight and question Jesus: Why don't your disciples live according to the traditions of the elders and clean their hands before they eat? This is all that Jesus needs to hear. He sticks up for his disciples, turns on these teachers and says, in essence, "Why do you not live according to

the traditions of God and clean your hearts?"

What mistake did these Pharisees make? What is Jesus trying to convey not only to them, but to us as well? For, you see, it is just as easy for us to fall into a good habit and leave behind a good heart.

What is Jesus' warning to us?

1. We prefer creeds rather than deeds.
2. We look at the outside not the inside.
3. God requires good creeds, deeds, and hearts.

## Reading

**Mark 12:41-44**



## Reflection

*"I tell you that this widow put more in the offering than all the others"*

The second focus of today's Gospel opens with Jesus sitting opposite the place where the offerings were put and observing the people make their donations as they come into the temple. He is not alone. Seated with him are the leaders of the Law. Jesus is

sitting with those whom he had scorned for their hypocrisy.

Remember that, as they watch, there is no paper money, so all of the offerings make a terrible noise as they roll down this long, horn-shaped object and fall into the pool of coins. And here comes this little old lady and she has two small coins, worth nothing, and drops them in. They barely make a noise. You can almost see the Temple leaders as they roll their eyes and hope for better results with the next person who walks in the door.

Jesus then calls his Disciples over and says, "This poor widow has



put more into the treasury than all the others." To the Sadducees this woman is a waste of time, but to Jesus she is the stuff by which Kingdoms are erected. Thus, at its heart, the story of the widow's

mite is a strong reminder to the kingdoms of this world that...



1. The Kingdom of God is built by the widow, as well as the wealthy.
2. The Kingdom of God recognizes the level of sacrifice.
3. The Kingdom of God warns us about pride.

Today's Gospel is concentrating on the question of truth: about being true to who we are, rather than presenting an image of ourselves that we think makes us look good. The scribes to whom Jesus refers, are not honest about who they are. But the widow who puts the two small, almost worthless coins into the treasury is not ashamed to let people see her for who she is.

Our work for the Lord may be simple and unknown to all but a very few. It is known to God and in God's sight: this is enough reward.

*\*Reflections are, in part, from the writings of Rev Brett Blair*





# A Song This Is All Our Joy

## **Refrain**

Something we have known  
from the beginning  
That we have seen  
with our own eyes  
The word of light  
from whom all living  
takes its voice and cries  
This is all our joy in Christ.



God is light, in God there is no  
darkness.  
God is love and if we live in God  
Love will be our promise.

## **Refrain**

See the love of God we have been  
given.  
We are called God's children  
and in love that is who we are.

## **Refrain**

Let us love, for this  
Is God's own being.  
God in Christ  
has shown us how to love  
living for each other.

## **Refrain**

*Words and music by Robyn Horner  
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# Blessing

## **The Prayer of St Ignatius**

'Take, O Lord, and receive  
my entire liberty, my memory,  
my understanding  
and my whole will.

All that I am and all that I possess  
you have given me:  
I surrender it all to you  
to be disposed of  
according to your will.  
Give me only your love  
and your grace;  
with these I will be rich enough,  
and will desire nothing more.'

With thanks to Dan Eaton  
for preparing today's reflection



# 14 November

## A Gathering

### Hannah's Prayer

*"My heart rejoices in the Lord,  
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.  
There is no one holy like the Lord,  
There is no one besides you;  
There is no rock like our God."*

Let us also praise God with enthusiasm and sincerity, giving thanks for all that we have been given.



## Preparation

When things do not go well, help us to trust you. But at the same time, let us remember that we need to play our part, not to sit back passively and expect God to do it all for us.

When we pray for others, may we be the hands and feet that carry out that action:

- help us to be the friend for the lonely person
- the one who takes food to the hungry
- who provides clothing for the naked



- and the one who helps their neighbour in need.

God, grant me the wisdom to know that some things need to change, grant me the wisdom to know that there is only one person I can change, and grant me the wisdom to know that person is me!

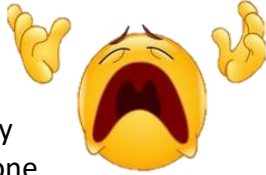
## Readings

**1 Samuel 1: 4–20, 2: 1-10**

**Hebrews 10: 11-25**

## Reflection

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you'd have done anything to get it? Almost literally?



And then have you rejoiced when you succeeded?

This is Hannah's story. Desperate to have a child in a society where having children was the only important thing for a woman. For this ensured there would be a next generation, someone to carry on the family name and take care of the property who was of your own flesh and blood. It also meant there would be someone to take care of the women, as widows had no rights and were shunned if they didn't have family to care for them.

And for Hannah, it wasn't happening. To make matters worse, the "other wife" had no trouble having children and made sure she rubbed it in. Although Hannah knew she was loved by her



husband, she still felt incomplete - a second-rate woman.

How often do we compare ourselves with others and what they have, and feel like we don't stack up? We feel inadequate and, if we're honest, want what they have, whether we deserve it or not. We find our expectations, hopes and dreams have not been met, and we only look at what we don't have. Sometimes a change of focus is required. This is exactly what Hannah did. We are not told whether Hannah regularly turned to God in prayer. What we do know is that when she was desperate, she turned to God with a prayer that was not the usual kind.

It wasn't a fleeting "God, give me what I want," and then leaving God to do everything. There was nothing shallow about Hannah's prayer: she really put some effort into it and had a long conversation with God. Maybe she was praying at a time when people usually weren't around. We know it was unusual because Eli noticed her and engaged with her. From firstly thinking she was drunk, after talking with her he comes to the



point where he sends her on her way with a blessing of peace.



Something changed in Hannah. Rather than taking the “poor helpless me” attitude and focussing inward, she looked outward to discover what she could do, little though it may have appeared to be. In her prayer, she gave her load to God and walked away lighter. She nourished her body and now had a changed disposition. She was focussing on what was possible, rather than what was, or wasn’t, happening.

And when her heart’s desire came true, she remembered to praise God and she also kept her promise.

Have you ever watched the TV show MASH? Often there will be a conversation between Father Mulcahy and someone who thought they weren’t going to make it or, at the very least, were in very hot water. In desperation, they would make a bargain with God that if they come out OK, they would change their ways and, often, they would promise to become a priest. Usually the outcome is that, when the person knows that everything will be

alright, they do not want to fulfil the promises they have made.

I wonder, how often do we find ourselves in a jam and make a promise to God that, if there is a favourable outcome, we will be a better person in some way? And how often do we actually carry out our promise when things work out?

In Hebrews 10: 15-16 we read: *The Holy Spirit confirms this: This new plan I’m making with Israel isn’t going to be written on paper, isn’t going to be chiselled in stone; this time “I’m writing out the plan in them, carving it on the lining of their hearts.”*



God doesn’t want glib answers, shallow promises and insincere hearts. Jesus came to change the story and build bridges and

relationships between God and the people, and amongst the people. No longer would people need to follow man-made rules, as God would write the rules within them: to be carried always and by everyone, to be a part of us.

## A Song

### Take my life and let it be

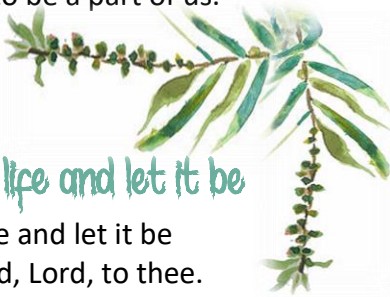
Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.  
Take my moments and my days  
let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love.  
Take my feet and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing  
always, only, for my King.  
Take my lips and let them be  
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold  
not a mite would I withhold.  
Take my intellect and use  
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine  
it shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart it is thine own  
it shall be thy royal throne.



Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
at thy Feet its treasure store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee.

*Frances Ridley Havergal 1836-79 alt  
Words and Music in the Public Domain*

## A Prayer

God, when we are desperate, help  
us to remember that you are here.

God, when we rejoice, help us to  
remember that you are here.

When we are afraid to take that  
step  
When we don't want to spend the  
time  
When we would rather do  
something else,  
When we would rather do  
anything else  
help us to remember that you are  
here.  
Amen



With thanks to  
Carolyn Sharp  
for preparing  
today's  
reflection

# 21 November

## A Gathering

One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning; like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.



## Preparation

This day of worship concludes the Christian year. We have moved through Advent and Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus, through Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. And now, on this day, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. It's the close of the worshipping year.

The celebration of the Feast of Christ the King, or Reign of Christ - now observed by the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Protestant and Reformed Churches - was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI for the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church. It was in response to growing secularism and nationalism not just in Europe with the rise of Fascism in Germany and Italy, but worldwide.

Pope Pius wanted the Feast to impact the laity – that Christ might reign in our hearts, our minds and our will, so that we might be instruments of justice unto God.

## Reading

**John 18:33-37**



## Reflection

The Gospel reading for today tells us of two things: one is a battle for power and the other a struggle to understand the nature of truth.

Those of us who have watched the television series Game of thrones will have been appalled by how the lust for power by rivals led to murder, assassination, to continuous warfare, acts of horror,

the brutalisation of both men and women and the abuse of children. These are the kinds of power games rife in Jesus' time, whether reflected in the struggles for power in Rome and Judea, or the power games being played by Caiaphas, the High Priest in Jerusalem.

While the reader concentrates on the trial of Jesus by the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, there is a third player in this game centring on kingship: the High Priest, Caiaphas.

Of the three, Pilate appears the most powerful. He has the final decision on what to do with the problem Caiaphas has handed on to him: what to do with this pestilential teacher from some obscure province. Caiaphas' power is more subtle. He wants Jesus, this upstart artisan who has dared to challenge the way things are done, gone. But he cannot do it himself, if he is to follow the letter of the law. So, he hands it on to the Romans, accusing Jesus of threatening Rome itself through his alleged claim to be a king: a king who could, potentially, lead a revolt against Rome, something

that would not please Emperor Tiberius.

And here Jesus ~~he~~ stands before Pilate: bound, beaten, bloody, alone, exhausted. He has been deserted by his friends, with no one there to plead his case. Totally powerless, it would seem. Yet, it is the seemingly powerless man who takes control of the interrogation.



For behind his face of power, Pilate feels threatened. He is well aware that people, including the Herodians, have been white-anting him in Rome; that the High Priest is pulling his string; that even his

wife has urged him to have nothing to do with that 'righteous man'.

Pilate confronts Jesus with perfectly sensible questions. Are you who they say you are? Are you the King of the Jews? But he doesn't get a yes/no answer. Jesus throws a question back at him. "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" So Pilate tries another question: "What have you done?" And this is where Jesus turns the question upside down. He does not claim to be a king but he does claim to rule a kingdom. It is not the kind of kingdom, secular or religious, that Pilate and Caiaphas understand. If it were, and if Jesus were that kind of king, then his followers would be rising in rebellion, attempting to save him.

And then Jesus explains, *"I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."*

It's not in today's reading, but we all know Pilate's response: "What is truth?"

Ask anyone today, "What is truth?" and you're sure to start an

interesting conversation. The concept of truth has clearly fallen on hard times, and the consequences of rejecting it are ravaging human society.

This profound and eternally significant question was posed by an unbeliever. Pilate, the man who handed Jesus over to be crucified, turned to Jesus in His final hour and asked, "What is truth?" It was a rhetorical question, a cynical response to what Jesus had just revealed: "I have come into the world, to testify to the truth."

Two thousand years later, the whole world breathes Pilate's cynicism. Some say truth is a power play: a narrative constructed by the elite for the purpose of controlling the ignorant masses. To some, truth is subjective: the individual world of preference and opinion. Others believe truth is a collective judgment: the product of cultural consensus. And still others flatly deny the concept of truth altogether.



So, what is truth?

Here's a simple definition drawn from what the Bible teaches: *Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God.* Even more to the point: *Truth is the self-expression of God.* That is the biblical meaning of truth. Because the definition of truth flows from God, truth is *theological*. It is a fancy way of saying it is the way things really are. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. Therefore, God is the author, source, determiner, governor, arbiter, ultimate standard and final judge of all truth.

So this is a challenge for us today. In this time when, as so often in the past, Christians and people of faith are being challenged on many sides. We are trying to find, some reassurance in a world choked with opinion, misinformation and downright lies; some sense of security. Where do we find it? We find it in Jesus. *Jesus is truth incarnate*: the perfect expression of God and, therefore, the absolute embodiment of all that is true.



## A Song We Limit Not The Truth of God

We limit not the truth of God  
to our poor reach of mind  
by notions of our day and sect  
crude, partial and confined.  
No, let a new and better hope  
within our hearts be stirred.  
*The Lord has yet more light and truth  
to break forth from his word.*

Our faithful forebears searching went  
the first steps of the way.  
This was the dawning, yet to grow  
Into the perfect day.  
And grow it shall, our glorious sun  
will brighter rays afford.  
*The Lord has yet more light and truth  
to break forth from his word.*

O Father, Son, and Spirit, send  
us increase from above.  
Enlarge, expand all living souls  
to comprehend your love.  
And make us all go on to know  
With nobler powers conferred  
*that you have yet more light and truth  
to break forth from your word.*

*Words and music in the Public Domain*





## Blessing

You are the sisters and brothers of  
the great Servant King.

No humble task is beneath him, no  
mercy is withheld.

No person it so him a waste of  
peace.

May your faith be big enough to  
learn from him and to daily  
welcome the inflooding of his  
humble yet resolute Spirit.

The grace of Christ Jesus be your  
only boast.

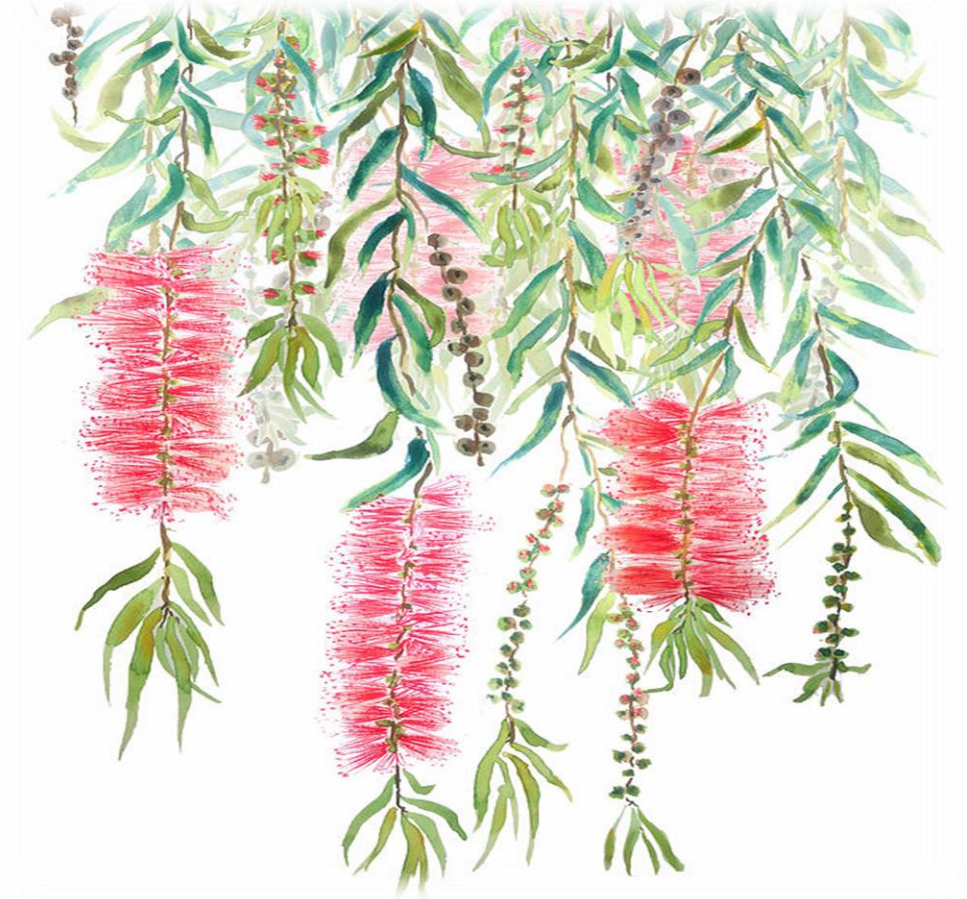
The love of God be your unfailing  
resource.

The fellowship of the Spirit be your  
deepest joy.

**Amen**

*Rev Bruce Prewer*

With thanks to Shirley Colless  
for preparing today's reflection





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