Order of Worship for November 22, 2026

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.
C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: *"Wake, Awake, For Night is Flying"* **- Hymn #516**

Confession and Absolution

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C: Amen.
P: Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.
C: If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.
P: As subjects of Christ the King, let us confess our sins to almighty God.

(Silence for meditation and self-examination.)

P: Almighty and all-merciful God,
C: We are dead in trespasses and sin; we have no power to rise. We have offended your majesty and defied your divinity; we have brought death and darkness where you once said, "Let there be light." We deserve the doom that you have decreed. For the sake of Jesus Christ, who gave his life for our redemption, we beg your forgiveness, and seek the power to become more faithful servants of Christ, the King.
P: For his sake God hears your prayer. In him you have forgiveness, life, and resurrection from the dead. By him you are redeemed and set at liberty. As a called and ordained servant of the Word, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C: To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Psalm: 90
P: LORD, You have been our dwelling place
C: in all generations.
P: Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
C:from everlasting to everlasting You are God.
P: You return man to dust
C: and say, "Return, O children of man!"
P: For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past,
C: or as a watch in the night.
P: You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,
C: like grass that is renewed in the morning:
P: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
C: in the evening it fades and withers.

P: For we are brought to an end by Your anger;
C: by Your wrath we are dismayed.
P: You have set our iniquities before You,
C: our secret sins in the light of Your presence.
P: For all our days pass away under Your wrath;
C: we bring our years to an end like a sigh.
P: The years of our life are seventy,
C: or even by reason of strength eighty;
P: yet their span is but toil and trouble;
C: they are soon gone, and we fly away.
P: Who considers the power of your anger,
C: and Your wrath according to the fear of You?
P: So teach us to number our days
C: that we may get a heart of wisdom.
P: Return, O LORD! How long?
C: Have pity on Your servants!
P: Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love,
C: that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
P: Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us,
C: and for as many years as we have seen evil.
P: Let Your work be shown to Your servants,
C: and Your glorious power to their children.
P: Let the favor of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us;
C: yes, establish the work of our hands!

Prayer:

P: Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C: Amen.

Hymn of Praise: *Herald, Sound the Note of Judgment*" - **Hymn #511**

First Lesson: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

R: "For thus says the LORD GOD: Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out My sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And 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 ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I Myself will be the shepherd of My sheep, and I Myself will make them lie down, declares the LORD GOD. 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, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. "Therefore, thus says the LORD GOD to them: Behold, I, I Myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will rescue My flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, My servant David, and He shall feed them: He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

R: Lord, have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

R: But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

R: Lord, have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Third Lesson: Matthew 25:31-46

P: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on his glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.'

"Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not

do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

P: Lord, have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Children's Message (8:30)

Sermon Hymn: *"The Clouds of Judgment Gather"*- **Hymn #513**

Sermon: *"The Kingdom of God"* **- Matthew 25:31-46**
Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the last Sunday of the Church Year. This is also the Sunday we celebrate The Feast of Christ the King: – Jesus' Kingship of all Creation: Jesus' Kingship: Which is one of the main themes of the Gospels. Yet - It only seems like a short time ago we read the Gospel account regarding Jesus' riding triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey – being welcomed as a king - but only to be crucified as a criminal a few days later. -- Jesus just did not fit the expectation of the peoples' desired King: They wanted an earthly king to free them from the occupation of Rome: Not a king who would be a convicted criminal who would die on a cross. Jesus surrendering Himself to His Father by going to the cross was an affront to them. However: The great news is that Jesus, by His death and resurrection, redeemed us of our sins and restored us into a right relationship with God was also given the authority of Kingship: To rule and to reign forever. Reality is, the skeptics and unbelievers, then as well as today, continue to ask: Just where is His Kingdom? Their reasoning is since we do not see His kingdom on any map or have a recognized space in the known world: He must not have any kingdom. We know their reasoning is without merit.

It is a mistake to understand the Greek phrase that is translated as -- "the Kingdom of God" -- to mean a particular place documented on a map or a designated space where Jesus specifically rules for a specific period as we measure time. "The Kingdom of God" is significantly much more because it signifies the fact that Jesus Christ reigns as Savior – the Lord over all creation. As such: "The Kingdom of God" does not refer specifically as to "going to heaven" - but should be understood as "accepting God's rule and sovereignty over all creation since the beginning of time": That God's Kingdom is also now. Welcoming Him to rule over us during every moment of our life being subject to the Triune God in all things and in all places – here on earth and in heaven: The "Kingdom of God" ultimately means that we are His chosen children; that we are loved and forgiven unconditionally of all our sins; no matter how great our sins may be.

We as members of the Kingdom of God have done nothing, absolutely nothing, to be included in the Kingdom of God. There is no way, what-so-ever, to earn our way into the Kingdom of God. We are made part of the Kingdom of God through our Baptism, being made righteous by the death and resurrection of Jesus: For most of us, our parents were called by the Holy Spirit to bring us to the Baptismal font and to instruct us in the faith. As we became adults, God by granting us free will we were given the choice to remain faithful to this gift Christ has given us

– or not. Regardless, of our decision; the one thing that is constant is the Holy Spirit continues to Call us to faith regardless of what our choice may have been. For some, our Gospel reading may have given them the false impression that we can "earn" our way into the Kingdom of God by doing good deeds: A concept called works righteousness. This is the opposite of the true understanding of Grace: That is: That we are saved by the Grace of God through faith and not works: Yet realizing that faith without works is dead. Thus, we need to take a very critical look at this Gospel reading to truly understand what it means.

Please note in the Gospel account: The righteous are surprised when the King welcomes them to eternal life. The righteous did not know of all their good work: They were truly surprised when their good works were told to them. This is clearly seen when they responded to Christ: When did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You. The righteous through their actions simply responded to the people they encountered in their lives because of the gift of faith they were given and accepted. The reality of their actions became clear when they heard the response of Jesus: If you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me.
Many of us have had similar types of "surprises" as those welcomed into eternal life with Christ in our Gospel reading. We experience this when someone comes up to us and says, "What you did for me sure helped me a lot. It truly means a lot to me. - or – "What you said to me had a powerful influence on my life. I am truly thankful and will be forever grateful." Then it hits us: While they were saying these things to us, we were trying very hard to remember what we did or what was said that was so beneficial for them. Reality is many times we don't know the good we are doing at the time of our doing it – we are just responding in love to the people God puts into our presence; people many times who are called "the least of these" and perhaps people we do not care for. The critical fact is the righteous do not keep score. Their good works in reaching out to others were done as a response in gratitude to Christ's gracious gift of the redemption of their sin given to them with these caring acts coming naturally, perhaps even unconsciously: Just like a good tree naturally producing "good fruit". The tree does not have to "think" about producing "good fruit" - it just does. So, it is with the person who professes Christ as the King of all Creation: They naturally strive to do good.

There are also the dynamics of the unrighteous giver. They like to recite their good deeds to as many people as they can – many times in great detail. The unrighteous are quite confident about their perceived righteousness and they like to keep score: A fact that is always true with humanly crafted perceived righteousness. In addition, many times there are strings attached to their giving as their deeds are mainly done for themselves. As such, they are not gifts of faith, they only see what they may gain by their actions. Remember: Love is not love, and devotion is not devotion, if it calculates the costs. Christ is very clear in the teaching about the people who measure their righteousness on human scales: They may be in for a shock at the day of judgment: Jesus clearly said: "Not everyone who says to Me: "Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven".

So where does that leave us here today at Memorial Lutheran Church in Ames. Iowa. When the

Holy Spirit called us - we responded and accepted the invitation to follow Christ. We, as such, are a Redeemed people and have "accepted God's rule and sovereignty" over our lives - in every moment of our life. Thus, we are already participating in the "Kingdom of God" and have been assured of eternal life by the gift of Grace of Jesus Christ. This precious "Gift" that transforms our lives - even though we remain sinners until the day we die. A "Gift" that we respond to in love and gratitude many times generating good deeds without realizing we are even responding to this miraculous "Gift of Grace". This is true because we have been made righteous and being righteous, we do not keep score. Yes, even though we know of our salvation – I believe we will to be very surprised on the Day of Judgment of all the people that we touched in our lives with the love of God. Remember: Jesus is profoundly clear: The life of the Christian is a life given in love to those we encounter. We have the choice how we respond in any giving situation: We need to Remember: The last thing anyone can take from us is our ability to make a choice on how we respond to any given situation we encounter.

To understand the resulting joy of the gift being a member of the Kingdom of God, to be unconditionally loved by God, was clearly and passionately expressed by Brennen Manning, one of my favorite spiritual writers: Manning, a former Roman Catholic priest, was said to have experienced the following when he was alone for several months living in a cave on a solemn retreat in the mountains of Spain while he was struggling with his faith. During this retreat Manning recalls a divine encounter with the Almighty. Brennen Manning stated in faith that he heard Christ say to him:

> *"For love of you I left my Father's side. I came to you who ran from me, fled me, who did not want to hear my Name. For love of you I was covered with spit, punched, beaten and affixed to the wood of the cross." -- This is not a joke, it is not a laughing matter to Me that I have loved you."*
>
> *Whereupon Brennen Manning shouted out …"Jesus you are crazy…Are You out of Your mind to have loved me so much?" Christ replied --- "NO !" I'm not crazy to have loved you this much!*

I must confess there have been some moments in my life that I can identify closely with Brennen Manning: Where I questioned why Christ would care about me and why I would be included in His Kingdom. But Jesus had the same response for me that he had for Brennen Manning:

Not in the same manner but in similar words: Regardless, the meaning was the same: "NO! – I'm not crazy to have loved you this much!" You may have also had a similar experience in realizing Christ's love for you. Christ's love for us calls us to respond in love and gratitude for all He has done and to show that love to others. To live life in its fullness in His Kingdom - giving thanks and praise to God for my debt of my sin has been paid in full: I am a redeemed Child of God. Brennen Manning summed it up in the following words that I like to quote often: <u>"If you truly believe in the Death and Resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. - Go forth and live a risen life: Think big and love a lot."</u>

As a Redeemed Child of God we can truly proclaim: "Yes – I am the one Jesus died for." "Yes – I am the one Jesus loves." "Yes, I am a citizen of the Kingdom of God." For this great gift for

the forgiveness of our sins, and for the great surprises that await us when we find out how God has used us and we did not even know it. --- we say -- "Thanks be to God". Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds in our Risen Lord and Savior; Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer of Hope:
P: Lord God, many times we see no hope for the future, no reason to go on.
C: Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What does it profit us for all our labor under the sun?
P: We can find no lasting comfort in this world.
C: We remember that in former times we were separated from Christ, enemies of Your children, and that You had promised us no hope. We were lost without You, without hope.
P: Comfort, comfort, Your people.
C:You have promised, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you, and you will be comforted in Jerusalem."
P: Help us to see that our hope is in Jesus Christ.
C: To us You have chosen to make known the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in us, the hope of glory.
P: Remind us of Jesus' words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me."
C: "I will not leave You as orphans; I will come to You. Here on earth You have many trails and sorrows, but cheer up, for I have overcome the world."
P: Keep us from putting our trust in anything except You.
C: "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground. On that very day their plans will come to nothing. Happy is he whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD, our God."
P: Give to us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom You send in Jesus' name to teach us and remind us of what Jesus said,
C: that we may encourage one another and build up one another, that we warn those who are lazy, comfort the timid, support the weak, and be patient with everyone.
P: For our hope is laid up in heaven which we have heard in the Word of truth, the Gospel.
C: We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.
P: Put us next to the cross where we hear Jesus' words to the thief in the face of hopelessness,
C: "Truly, I say to you. Today you shall be with me in paradise."

Prayers

Lord's Prayer

Closing Prayer:

P: Almighty and ever-living God, before the earth was formed and even after it ceases to be, You are God. Break into our short span of life and let us see the signs of our final will and purpose in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing (Pastor)
C: Amen

Closing Hymn: *"The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns"* **– Hymn #348**