

Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon



Sunday 23 August 2020

Order of Service for Worship At Home

Gathering in God's presence (If you have one, light a candle.)

Call to Worship (drawn from Romans 12.1-2)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, by God's mercies,
let us present ourselves fully to God who receives us and sanctifies us.
Let us no longer chase after the world's expectations;
instead let us learn God's will and God's way,
and so be transformed in goodness for God's purposes,
made perfect in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn

At the Name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every 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.

Humbled for a season,
to receive a Name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
he became a witness,
faithful to the last,
and returned victorious
when from death he passed.

When this same Lord Jesus
shall appear again
in his Father's glory,
there with him to reign,
then may we adore him,
all before him bow,
as our hearts confess him
King of glory now.

Caroline M Noel (altered and abridged). Public domain text. Tune: 'Camberwell'.

Prayer of Approach

Take time to identify three things you want to thank God for, then join in the prayer:

Holy God, you have summoned us,
and so we present ourselves to you in worship.
Hear us as we give you thanks
for the blessings we have received,
through which you have revealed your presence and your power...

God our Father, we offer you our thanks and praise.
In love you have made us,
in love you bless us.
Reveal your truth to us now, we pray.

Jesus, Son of the living God, we offer you our thanks and praise.
In mercy you have reconciled us,
in mercy you renew us.
Build your church among us now, we pray.

Holy Spirit, we offer you our thanks and praise.
In grace you have equipped us,
in grace you transform us.
Embed your purpose in us now, we pray.

Holy God,
we present ourselves to you in worship,
seeking the coming of your kingdom
as we join in the pattern of prayer which Jesus gave his friends...

The Lord's Prayer

Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive
those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

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,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Listening for God's Word

Bible Reading: Matthew 16.13-20

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' **14** And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' **15** He said

to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' **16** Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' **17** And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' **20** Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

[In the video of the service a Theme Introduction will be included here, followed by an introduction to this week's Junior Church activities]

Hymn

You, you are Christ the Lord,
Son of the living God!
In ev'ry place adored
where human feet have trod:
for in this name,
though flesh may fail,
God's power is known,
and shall prevail.

Steadfast and joyful faith;
love that can cast out fear;
courage in life or death,
knowing that you are near:
by these, preserve us lest we fall,
and keep us open to your call.

Glory to God now sing -
Maker of all who live.
Glory to Christ our King,
and to the Spirit give.
Glory to God who was before,
is now, and shall be evermore!

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Bible Reading: Psalm 138

- 1** I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
- 2** I bow down towards your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;
for you have exalted your name and your word
above everything.
- 3** On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.
- 4** All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord,

for they have heard the words of your mouth.

5 They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
for great is the glory of the Lord.

6 For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.

8 The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Reflection

When you meet someone for the first time, how do you form an opinion of them?

I guess that'll partly depend on the situation, the context. We might have been told about them beforehand by someone who knows them, and so their experience will have already shaped what we think of the person. Or maybe our expectations will be at least partly determined by the role they're in – so for example if you've gone into a hair salon for a post-lockdown haircut, you'll be assuming that the person wielding the scissors has been properly trained and knows what they're doing. And if the end result is good, then chances are you'll go back to them when you next need a haircut.

One way or another, our opinions about other people are based on the information we have about them; and that information often comes on the basis of how we or someone close to us has interacted with them.

So that when we're asked "who is this?", our answer will involve more than just giving a name: it'll involve delving into a set of experiences, a narrative that has shaped our opinion, our attitude.

That's a principle we see at work in our Bible readings today. Because in a sense, at the heart of the Bible is the question, "Who is God?". And it's a question that Scripture seeks to answer partly by means of poetic eloquence, partly through philosophical endeavour, but chiefly – it's fair to say – through the power of experience. The Bible sets out the story, the testimony, of individuals and communities - and even nations - who have encountered and walked with God, and so can tell us something about who God is.

Psalm 138 illustrates that point. Because if you were to unearth a song-book from an ancient Temple, you might expect the hymns to be all mystical reflections about God's transcendence, God's separateness, God's unapproachability and inscrutability. But no, this is Israel's Temple and Israel's God we're talking about, and Israel answers the question "Who is God" not with reference to abstract spirituality but instead by telling us what God has been doing in human experience, and what that reveals about God's character.

- Verse 3, God has answered, God has strengthened.
- Verse 4, God has spoken, and the leaders of nations have heard.
- Verse 6, God has been looking after the lowly – and keeping a stern eye on those who swagger in their own strength.
- Verse 7, God protects and delivers; not aloof, but present and involved, even

when I walk in the midst of trouble.

Who is God? The Psalmist testifies that God is the One who is worthy of all thanks and praise, because of all that God's deeds reveal about God's character. Experience shapes attitude.

And how about you – is this the God of your experience, the God you have come to know? Because Psalm 138 is not only a song of worship, it's also a song of invitation. In presenting its testimony to God's deeds and God's character, it extends to you a hand of hope: will you now come, and share in the assurance that "the LORD's purpose for me WILL be fulfilled", that "the LORD's steadfast love SHALL endure for ever"? And if it is true that sometimes we form our opinions on the basis of what others have told us – then you could do worse than take this step of faith.

But in our Gospel passage this morning, Jesus takes that fundamental question "Who is this?" - and takes it in a revolutionary new direction. First he quizzes the disciples on how other people are talking about him – and they answer that he's being identified as one or other of the nation's prophets, whether from a former generation or from all-too-recent memory, now somehow returned from the grave and reinstated to active service. "But what about YOU" – retorts Jesus - "who do YOU say that I am?". And it falls to Simon Peter to articulate that he, Jesus, is nothing less than God's own Son, the Messiah.

What's interesting here is that the people's view of Jesus, as it's reported, arises out of experience. They've taken THEIR OWN experience of what he has been saying and doing among them – the parables and the miracles alike - and the only way they've been able to make sense of him has been to map that on to their INHERITED experience, on to all that has been recorded in Israel's Scriptures. This Jesus, they reason, must be someone from "back then" - and in an effort to know him, to identify him, they look to the past.

Whereas Simon Peter's declaration of Jesus as Christ, as Messiah, points not to what has been but rather to what God is about to do. And yes, inevitably, it's an insight that has arisen for him on the back of all that he has seen and heard from Jesus; yet even so, Jesus is clear that this is something different, something new. "This isn't something you've learned from other people, nor from your own powers of perception," he tells him, "no, this has been revealed to you from heaven!"

And then something really rather wonderful happens. This revelation to Simon Peter, this future-oriented recognition that Jesus is the personification of God who is doing a new thing, prompts Jesus to turn swiftly from "Who do you say I am" to "This is who I say you are". From getting us to think about God, to telling us what God has in mind for us.

"You are Peter – and this is the rock of revelation on which the Church is going to be built, and no power of death will overcome it". Though it's Simon Peter individually who's the immediate recipient of these words, ultimately it's a word of promise that is for all of us who seek to bind ourselves in faith to Jesus. For the Church's ministry – and the salvation to which the Church testifies – arises not from any wisdom or achievement of our own, but by God's revelation in Christ.

And so again I pose the question: How about you? Who do YOU say that Jesus is? As you read of him in the Bible, does he appear to you as essentially a feature of the past, a relic of other people's experience; and his Church as principally an institution, a vehicle for continuity and familiarity? Or do you sense in him something else, something more – as a feature of your own experience, the revelation of a Power that

spans past and present and future, and drawing us now and always into Newness and Renewal?

And could it be that as Jesus bids you come to him, with whatever opinion you may have formulated and whatever degree of faith you feel able to muster, he stands ready to tell you, "This is who I say you are..." ...?

Responding to God's grace

Praying for Needs & Concerns (led by Margaret Tulloch)

Please join me in prayers of concern as we pray for the world, our church and ourselves.

Across the world there are so many for whom our prayers are needed -

- We think about Covid 19 which has been with us for more than half a year. We pray that the efforts of all those seeking a cure and a vaccine will bring results and that countries throughout the world will be strengthened in their efforts to contain the virus.
- We pray for the nearly 80 million people across the world who have been forcibly displaced from their homes and for the countries which have offered them a refuge.
- We pray for the American people as they move towards the Presidential election in November.
- We pray for the people of Belarus as they try to bring about a change to a more open and democratic society.
- We pray for the people of Beirut as they try to rebuild their city and also to bring about political change.
- We pray for the people of Mali as the military coup unfolds there.
- We pray for the Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny gravely ill in hospital.
- In our country we pray for our politicians here as they take decisions which will affect us all.
- As furlough begins to end we pray for everyone facing the fear of loss of employment or of losing their businesses.
- We pray for the many families and individuals who might face eviction from their homes and for the many people already homeless on our streets.

- We pray particularly for young people here who have had to face uncertainty about their A levels, BTec and GCSE and now may worry about their futures.
- We pray for the many thousands of key workers in this country who have been crucial to our coping with the virus and now may be taking a well earned holiday. May their holidays be restful and free from stress about their return.
- We pray for schools across the country as they plan to bring all their pupils back in September.
- We pray that the lessons we have learned about how much we need each other will be a positive and lasting outcome when the virus is long forgotten. We pray that cooperation and understanding will prevail over division and violence.

We pray for Trinity as we continue to reach out to each other through digital means. We pray for Dominic who is doing so much work to keep us in touch and to keep the

church going. We pray for him and Miriam as they plan for the future.

Lastly we pray for ourselves. We pray –

- For everyone anxious about the future, both old and young, healthy and ill.
- We pray for the lonely whose lives have been even more affected by the lockdown.
- And for the friends and family of those who are ill or in care homes and for those coping with grief over the death of those they love.

We take a few moments to pray for those known to us and those who have asked for our prayers.

All these prayers we bring to you through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen

Offertory

This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness. You might like to put it in a jar for now, ready to be brought in person when circumstances allow. Then say the prayer below (if you already participate in Trinity's Planned Giving scheme via direct bank transfer, then simply recite the prayer – no need for a jar!).

Generous God, your gift to me
is life, and sustenance, and hope.
I bring to you my gift, and myself.
Receive, Lord, and bless:
so that both gift and giver
may bring blessing to others,
and glory to your name. Amen.

Hymn

Lord, thy Church on earth is seeking
thy renewal from above;
teach us all the art of speaking
with the accent of thy love.
We would heed thy great commission:
"Go now into every place -
preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,
serve with love and share my grace".

Freedom give to those in bondage,
lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
grant release from fears within.
Light for darkness; joy for sorrow;
love for hatred; peace for strife:
these and countless blessings follow
as the Spirit gives new life.

In the streets of every city
where the bruised and lonely dwell,
let us show the Saviour's pity,
let us of his mercy tell;

to all lands and peoples bringing
all the richness of thy word,
till the world, thy praises singing,
hails thee Christ, Redeemer, Lord.

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Closing Prayer and Blessing

Let us go from this time of worship,
ready to live out the calling that God has placed upon each of us.

So may the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be upon us, and among all who are dear to us,
whether near or far,
today and always. Amen.

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