

14th April 2024 – Morning Service

Martin Filsak

Call to Worship

Let all the ends of the earth remember and turn again to the Lord; let all the families of nations bow before him. For kingly power belongs to the Lord; dominion over the nations is his. (Psalm 22:27-28)

StF 317 – At the name of Jesus

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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:
- 3) 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.
- 4) In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true;
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.
- 5) For this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord, you have made yourself known to your people in many ways. We see your power and glory in the things that have been made: sun, moon and stars, the earth with its rivers and oceans and mountains and abundant life. You have revealed your nature supremely through your Son Jesus, in his life and teaching and in his compassion and healing concern. We see your glory in his resurrection and praise you for that mighty demonstration of power. We stand in awe of the knowledge that the very same power is at work in the lives of all who trust in Jesus. You speak to your Church by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. In him we have a companion and helper.

You are glorious in your perfection and kingly power. Your grace endures forever. Your love is without equal. Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, accept our worship and adoration. You are God of faithfulness and without injustice. We are redeemed people but still flawed and making mistakes, yet we confess our faults and shortcomings knowing that we are forgiven through our trust in Christ, the only perfect human being, who bore our sins. We receive the assurance: our sins are forgiven!

As we join with our brothers and sisters in Christ we come in full assurance of faith and of the forgiveness of sins. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

We will shortly hear a reading from the book of Acts. To set it in context: this follows on from the story of the healing of a man crippled from birth. This man had been begging at the Temple gate every day. On this particular day the apostles Peter and John are there and the man asks them for a gift of money. Peter responds by saying that he has no silver or gold, but then gives him something much more valuable. Peter commands him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise up and walk, and the man springs to his feet and enters the temple, walking and leaping and praising God:

Reading: Acts 3:11-24

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'

"Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days."

StF 363 – My Jesus, my Saviour

1) My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord there is none like you.
All of my days I want to praise
the wonders of your mighty love.
My comfort, my shelter,
tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am,
never cease to worship you.

*Ch) Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing,
power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down
and the seas will roar
at the sound of your name.
I sing for joy at the work of your hands.
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
promise I have in you.*

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CCL No. 515642

In a moment we hear some words from the gospel of Luke. The reading follows on from a former narrative. Two people on the road to Emmaus are joined by a stranger. They discover, when this person breaks bread in their home, that he is Jesus. These two in great excitement return to Jerusalem and tell their story to the company of disciples that had gathered, who were already talking about the Lord's resurrection. Jesus then appears in their midst:

Reading: Luke 24:36-48

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Both of today's Bible readings have referred to there being ancient prophecies, which have spoken about Jesus long in advance of his human life on earth. Our hymn takes up this theme and shows us that God has also spoken by his Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

StF 157 – God has spoken, by his prophets

- 1) God has spoken — by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging word;
each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holding fast:
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last.
- 2) God has spoken — by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one;
spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time was born;
Light from Light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all.
- 3) God is speaking — by the Spirit,
speaking to our hearts again,
in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith is standing fast;
God still speaks, the Word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.

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Sermon

Imagine the feelings of the disciples... if you can! They have followed Jesus throughout his ministry and seen and heard many wonderful things. They believe that he is the Messiah, God's chosen one, who is to set his people free. They go through the trauma of seeing their Lord crucified. It appears that their mission has failed and all hope is lost. Then, reports and experiences occur that show that the Lord is risen. The tomb is empty. How can this be? Now, the risen Lord himself has appeared to Simon, and the two travellers from the road to Emmaus have encountered him too. This all backs up the words of the

women who found the tomb empty and heard angelic testimony of the resurrection, and reported this to the initially incredulous disciples.

Now, with the eleven and others assembled in Jerusalem, Jesus himself appears among them, and they are startled and terrified, with doubts and fears. Jesus himself reassures them that he is real and not a ghost. He eats some food simply to prove that he is physically present. Once the disciples are reassured and presumably have calmed down sufficiently to be able to listen to what Jesus is saying to them, he points to the fact that everything written about him in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and psalms, was bound to be fulfilled.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews (in the first chapter) says that when in times past God spoke to the forefathers of the Jewish people, he spoke in many and varied ways through the prophets, but in this the final age he has spoken through his Son.

In both of our readings today we heard that Jesus himself was spoken of long ago through those very same prophets of old. They had foretold the things that had just happened, and things yet to come.

Why is this important?

This matters because it tells us that there is nothing random or accidental about what happened to Jesus. His life, death and resurrection were written about long ago. His arrest, trial and sentencing to crucifixion were not some consequence of things going wrong, but part of the script from the beginning. It was no aberration. Things had not unravelled. This was God's plan all along. While we have the gift of hindsight, the disciples did not yet understand this. For them, their world had been shattered. It's difficult for us to begin to enter into the emotions of those who followed Jesus, thought that he would be the one who would liberate his nation from the Romans, and found that he was instead sentenced to death. The resurrection then enters the story as something wonderful and yet bewildering and incomprehensible, then Jesus appears to his followers in our gospel passage and shows them that God's plan hadn't gone astray at all. Everything had happened exactly as the prophets had been saying for centuries.

The prophetic witness shows us also that there is continuity with the past. God planned this long ago! Jesus is not a character who suddenly appears out of nothing and changes the course of history. Sure, the course of history was changed, but this was all part of God's plan, spoken of by the prophets.

To put it another way, there is a big story! The story goes back centuries, and continues into the future.

The disciples knew what the Scriptures said. They were Jews and would have learned them from a young age, but they didn't know what they meant. The meaning was somehow hidden from them. Had they understood them they would not have been surprised by events. Verse 45 is significant: Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures. It was important to Jesus that they saw him in what was written long ago. It's important for us too, that we do not neglect the Hebrew scriptures (which we call the Old Testament) that would have been known to the disciples. Although some parts of them we may find difficult to understand, there are many treasures there where we can see Jesus pre-figured many years before his incarnation. We have the benefit of the Holy Spirit's help as we seek to understand both testaments, and also we have many gifted writers and teachers who can open to us the meaning of the text.

There is another consequence of the prophecies of old about Jesus. Verse 44 says that everything written about Jesus was bound to be fulfilled. It does not say that everything has now been fulfilled! In other words, the big story hasn't finished yet! There is more to come. Yes, the prophecies of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection have come to pass, but there are many more prophecies about Jesus, which, if we understand them, tell us about what he will yet accomplish. There will be another Advent, this time with Jesus coming not in weakness but in power and glory. There will be a fulfilment where Jesus reigns as King over all the earth. Our passage in Acts (which incidentally is written by the same author as the gospel of Luke) refers to this in verses 19 and 20 of chapter 3, where Peter in his "sermon" to those astounded by the healing of the lame man exhorts them to repent and turn to God so that their sins may be wiped out,

and then the Lord will send the Messiah. Wait a moment! Hadn't the Lord already sent the Messiah? Well, yes, but Peter is referring to the second Advent, which will occur at a time of universal restoration of which God has spoken by his prophets from the beginning! There is more to come!

Back to our passage in Luke's gospel, it appears that not only is there a future story, but the disciples are part of it! They are to testify to what they have seen and proclaim the message to all nations beginning from Jerusalem! The first disciples could not possibly accomplish reaching the whole world on their own and in their own generation, but we are their successors and can testify to what the Lord has done for us, therefore taking up our place in the narrative!

This leads to an astounding conclusion. We are part of the big story too! The Bible is an amazing collection of books for many reasons, not least of which is that we are in it! Your name or mine do not necessarily appear in the text unless we have a Biblical namesake, but you and I are nevertheless referred to in all kinds of ways. For example, in John chapter 17 Jesus prays for those who will believe in him through the witness of other disciples.

Some Christians give the impression that the whole of the Bible is about how an individual can be saved. Although that is a very important part of the story, to limit it to that loses sight of the fact that the Bible is much more! It is a cosmic drama. God works through individuals and nations over many centuries to bring about his restoration plan for a fallen universe and re-establish his kingdom. The history books are in the Bible for a good reason: they tell us that God's plan is worked out through real people in real places. The history of the nation of Israel, including all those lists of kings, is part of that narrative, as is its future and that of other nations. Yes, make sure that you are saved and redeemed through your trust in Christ's finished work, and therefore assured of eternal life. That's the starting point for an individual. However, see also where you fit into the big story!

We live in the time spoken of in Hebrews chapter 1, this "final age" after the first coming of the Messiah, and we look forward to his second Advent. The ancient prophets continue to speak to us and give us landmarks of where we currently are in God's timetable. Trust in Jesus and his free grace for personal salvation! Be aware also of the big story. Let us pray that our minds are opened to the scriptures in order that we ourselves understand our part in the cosmic drama!

StF 333 – Majesty

Majesty, worship his majesty;
unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.
Majesty, kingdom authority,
flows from his throne unto his own,
his anthem raise.

So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus,
magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus, the King.
Majesty, worship his majesty,
Jesus, who died, now glorified,
King of all kings.

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Thanksgiving and Intercessions

Almighty God, you have given us through faith in your Son the assurance of eternal life, and you have made us part of your cosmic drama of redemption and restoration. We offer our thanks and praise. We pray for the courage and understanding to take our place in your purposes. May we stand on the truth of your promises.

In a world that tells us that we are the products of random chemical changes and subject to chaotic and purposeless events, grant us the steadfastness to proclaim a different narrative, a better story, the gospel truth that all people matter to you and are called to completeness in Christ.

We pray for areas of the world where it is clear that restoration and healing are needed.

For places where there is war we seek the reign of Christ. We pray especially for the peace of Jerusalem leading to justice and rest for the whole world under the kingship of Christ. Over areas of famine we pray for provision and abundance, and blessing for those who bring relief. We pray for our own nation: our government and the Royal Family, especially for the health of the King and Princess of Wales.

For our own church members and others known to us who specially need your touch we pray that your presence will be known to them by way of healing, comfort, strength, resources, courage and wisdom. As the Circuit and District look to the future, grant wisdom and courage to our leaders. May the Holy Spirit be our guide. Renew us and fill us with holy fire and a deep love and desire to meet the needs of our communities and draw people to the Saviour.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

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 for ever. **Amen.**

StF 340 – Ye Servant of God

- 1) Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol;
his kingdom is glorious, and rules over all.
- 2) God ruleth on high, almighty to save;
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,
ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.
- 3) 'Salvation to God who sits on the throne!'
Let all cry aloud, and honour the Son;
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb.
- 4) Then let us adore, and give him his right;
all glory and power, all wisdom and might,
all honour and blessing, with angels above,
and thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love.

Charles Wesley *CCL No. 515642*

God, who calls us to wholeness, grant that we may follow Jesus with joy and courage, taking up our place as proclaimers of truth and recipients and sharers of Kingdom treasure. **Amen.**

Blessing

Let us minister to one another in the words of the blessing:

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.