

17th May 2026 – Morning Service
‘God with us’ – The Spirit of Listening
A service for Thy Kingdom Come
Melanie Walters

Call to Worship from Jeremiah 29:13, Psalm 139:7-10, and Psalm 85:8

Come, let us listen to what God the Lord says, for God promises peace to the people of God, God’s faithful servants.

Surely God’s salvation is near to those who honour God.

Where can we go from your Spirit, Lord? Or where can we flee from your presence?

If we ascend to heaven, you are there; if we make our bed in the depths, you are there.

Even there, your hand shall lead us, and your right hand shall hold us fast.

Therefore, we will seek you, Lord, and we will find you when we search for you with all our hearts.

Let us worship our God who is always present and speaks peace to our souls!

StF 20 – Be still for the presence of the Lord

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| 1) Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here.
Come, bow before Him now
With reverence and fear.
In Him no sin is found,
We stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here. | 3) Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place,
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister His grace.
No work too hard for Him,
In faith receive from Him;
Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place. |
| 2) Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire,
With splendour He is crowned,
How awesome is the sight,
Our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around. | |

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Prayer of Adoration, Confession and Thanksgiving

O God, King of the Universe, Prince of Peace, Spirit of Holiness, your divine love surpasses all others, reaching into the very depths of our souls. It transforms us as You search us, for You have known us fully since before time began. With the days of our lives written in your book, you are aware of every aspect of our lives, present in every moment. Like a Shepherd, you lead us, gently guiding us back to your paths. Your correction is like that of the best of parents: a comfort, for our boundaries are clearly marked and proven to be only for our good. Even when our paths stray into the deepest darkness, we can find reassurance in your presence beside us. In coming to earth as your precious son, Jesus, who lived our life and died that we might know that death has lost its sting, you have shown that there is nowhere we can go where we are not in your presence. In leaving your Spirit with us, you have ensured that if we seek you, we will find you. You are indeed Immanuel, God with us, to the very end of the age. Father, Son and Spirit, as we adore, honour, assert your glory and praise your holy name, we recognise our human frailty. We know we live in a time of now and not yet, when it is all too easy to be distracted and fail to hear and respond to Your will that Your Kingdom be realised on earth as in heaven.

In the silence that follows, take time to feel God present here now in the peace which surrounds. Then ask God, through the power of the Spirit, to help you acknowledge those times when you have failed to listen and so failed to respond to God. Then, as you tune into God's frequency, hear and feel the stillness, peace and poise of the one who brings you complete forgiveness.

Silence

In the name of Jesus, we pray. **Amen.**

Loving and forgiving God, knowing it is only by Your grace that we can enter Your presence, but that to be in Your presence is to know ourselves complete, we give You thanks and join our voices with the unending hymn of praise and thanksgiving as we read or sing:

StF 77 – Give thanks to the Lord

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| 1) Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King:
His love endures forever.
For He is good, He is above all things.
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise. | Ch) <i>Forever, God is faithful</i>
<i>Forever, God is strong</i>
<i>Forever, God is with us, forever</i>
<i>Forever, God is faithful</i>
<i>Forever, God is strong</i>
<i>Forever, God is with us, forever, forever</i> |
| 2) With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
His love endures forever
For the life that's been reborn
His love endures forever
Sing praise, sing praise,
Sing praise, sing praise | 3) From the rising to the setting sun,
His love endures forever.
By the grace of God, we will carry on.
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise
Sing praise, sing praise |

Chris Tomlin © 2000 worshiptogether.com songs

Comment

Today, we approach the mid-point of the eleven days between Ascension and Pentecost. Remembering that during this time the extended group of disciples devoted themselves to constant prayer for the fulfilment of God's Kingdom on earth. This period is marked by the now annual global ecumenical call to pray for five people we know to come to Christ, known as *Thy Kingdom Come*. *Thy Kingdom Come* began in 2016, so a whole decade ago, as a small UK-based, Church of England initiative. The movement began with the seedling of an idea, which grew from understanding that if God's Kingdom is to come on earth, it will start with those who are praying for it as they seek to listen and respond to God's will. Each year, a different theme is chosen. This year, the theme is "God with us" – a reminder that the gift of Immanuel received at Christ's birth is transformed from a physical, localised presence into a universal spiritual presence through Jesus' Ascension to glory and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. *God with us* is the gift God offers everyone. The challenge we are considering today is how those who know God with us might be the means through which those we know and love recognise God's call.

So, who are your five? Take a moment to bring them to mind.

On each of the eleven days, the *Thy Kingdom Come* team are sharing stories that demonstrate God's transformative presence, power, and love at work. Today's is from 1 Samuel. When we dip into Samuel's story, he is almost a teenager helping Eli, the priest, in the temple. Samuel's name means "heard from God". He is an answer to prayer and will go on to become the last and greatest in the line of judges, a masterpiece in God's plan. In the preceding chapter, we are told Eli's sons, also priests, have displeased God to the extent that God decides that their priestly line will die out and another will be chosen instead.

As you read, what do you learn about listening to God and about helping others to tune into God's frequency?

Reading: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10 (NIV)

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel.

Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' And he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.'

But Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.' So he went and lay down.

Again the Lord called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.'

'My son,' Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.'

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

A third time the Lord called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.'

Then Eli realised that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!'

Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

StF 610 – Best of all is God is with us

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| 1) Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail. | 4) Best of all is God is with us,
In our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'Life is Christ, and death is gain.' |
| 2) Best of all is God is with us,
Life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget. | 5) Best of all is God is with us
As we scale eternal heights,
Love grows stronger, undiminished;
Earth grows dim by heaven's lights. |
| 3) Best of all is God is with us,
Hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
Faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
Grace received and hope reformed. | |

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Our Gospel reading gives us Luke's version of Jesus helping his disciples to make their own direct connection between heaven and earth as he teaches them to pray the words now known as The Lord's Prayer. As you read, consider what lessons we could learn from Jesus that might help our five friends/family tune into God?

Reading: Luke 11: 1-13 (NIV)

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'

He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

“Father,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

Then Jesus said to them, ‘Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.” And suppose the one inside answers, “Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.” I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

‘So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

‘Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

Sermon

The best of all is, God is with us! In the last moments of his life, it is told that with all that remained of his strength, Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, raised his arms in the air and twice cried out: *The best of all is, God is with us!* Words repeated to affirm the greatest privilege of faith; the joy of every believer; the defeater of doubt; the understanding that warms the soul: God is with us. God will hold and never fail, life is Christ, and death is gain. It can only be a God-incidence that in the year “God with us” is the chosen theme for *Thy Kingdom Come*; next Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, also marks to the day, the anniversary of the moment in 1738 when Wesley felt his faith affirmed and his heart strangely warmed by his recognition of God’s Spirit within him. At the time, Wesley was listening to Luther’s description of the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ. However, read Wesley’s journal for that day, and you will see that from the early morning, he continually showed God he was listening as he prayerfully turned to Scripture and God, repeatedly spoke, steering Wesley toward the final wonderful moment of understanding.

Wanting everyone to receive the assurance he experienced, Wesley realised the need to share God’s open invitation with all with ears to hear. In doing so, Wesley saw Methodism grow like the proverbial mustard seed. That same desire for more to hear and experience the coming of God’s kingdom in their lives is also the driver behind the *Thy Kingdom Come* movement, which, like Methodism once did, has grown without ceasing since it began.

It soon becomes apparent in our reading that Samuel has ears to hear and is a responsive listener. Earlier still, however, a flag is raised to suggest that this may not be enough for Samuel to recognise who is calling. In the first verse, we are told that *in those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions*. In other words, God was silent. Amos 8: 11-12 describes *a famine of hearing the words of the Lord, where people stagger from sea to sea... searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it*. Look back to the woefully sinful behaviour of Eli’s sons in the preceding chapter, which Eli fails to condemn, and it is not really a surprise that God is speechless! Eli’s family were chosen to be hereditary priests. They were meant to be the very example to God’s people of what it means to hear and then respond in obedience to the will of God, and they have failed spectacularly!

Thankfully, hope is offered in verse 3: *the lamp of God*, which represents God’s presence, *has yet to go out*. Eli, who let the problems, concerns and temptations of his earthly existence distract him from tuning into God’s frequency, has experience and knowledge of listening to God, which, just in time, he realises he needs to share. God’s persistence in calling makes room for another chance. In telling Samuel he must

acknowledge God's presence and then listen, Eli fits the missing piece needed for Samuel to encounter God with him. Now, Samuel is equipped to listen and respond. He finds his place in God's plan to restore God's people and so continues the golden thread which leads to Jesus and salvation for all.

Is there a place or a way that helps you to 'tune' in and 'hear' God?

Did you need someone or something to help you first find your way to recognising God's presence with you?

There is a great story in the Local Preachers training about an elderly lady who has been trying for decades to hear God, to know God with her, but sadly without success. When an archbishop visits the residential home where she lives, the lady seizes her chance to quiz the "expert" on what is needed. On discovering that the lady has been fervently repeating the same prayer without ceasing, the archbishop suggests that she first tidy her room, settle herself in her chair by the window and knit. Nothing more. On his next visit, the lady eagerly shares that, having followed his instructions and remembered she must knit, she first noticed that the silence surrounding her was not an absence of noise, but had substance. The silence had a density, a richness, that began to fill her, and then at the very heart of the silence, she had finally discovered Him who is all stillness, all peace, all poise.

Maybe you recognise the lady's experience? It certainly chimes with mine, in the sense that I find I am best able to listen to God when I resist the urge to race into the day's tasks, set aside distractions and begin alone in a comfy place, quietly reading my Bible, asking and giving time to consider what God might be saying. I don't find silence easy, but for me it is key. Taking time and making space for God in a quiet place like this is an example that my parents set for me.

Reading through this year's [Thy Kingdom Come materials](#), I discovered that the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Sarah Mullally, also finds that it is going to *a place in my house... every morning to pray, to study the Bible, say Morning Prayer, or just be still. But more than that, it's all about rhythm – having a routine that gives God space and time to speak, and [her] soul the chance to listen.*

Of course, you don't have to be still to listen if you know for whom or for what you are listening. Listening requires much more than just hearing; it involves conscious effort, attention to sounds, words, and even non-verbal cues if we are to interpret and understand. Dora Hayes, the Principal Officer for Ecumenical Development and Relations, Churches Together England, also writing for [Thy Kingdom Come](#), says *it was on a trip far from home, in the natural world, that God's nearness became real. In the quiet stillness of early mornings, in the majesty of the mountains that I walked on... In the closeness and vastness of the skies, in the heat of the sun and the movement of the trees in the wind, I was reminded that God's presence is not confined to buildings, routines or even people. God was already there, just waiting for me to take notice... As I stood at the top of a mountain, God's closeness and companionship was true for me. During that time, I also found myself learning from other Christian traditions... new ways of prayer, silence and reflection.*

Gospel writer Luke sets our New Testament passage in context by placing it immediately after Jesus stops on his way to Jerusalem, at the home of his friends, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. In that brief story, Martha appears distracted by worldly concerns, whilst Mary chooses *what is better* as she sits listening at Jesus' feet. This message is swiftly followed by a reminder that, like Dora Hayes, Jesus finds God's closeness and companionship away from distractions on the slopes of a mountain or in the natural world. This is a repeated image in Luke, in total there are seven occasions (the Jewish number of perfection – you can count and let me know if you agree there are seven!) where Jesus withdraws or pauses his journey to make time to seek, listen and respond to God. Each time Jesus returns, assured of his next steps and empowered. The disciples' request to learn to pray is, then, a direct response to the example Jesus sets of a man who listens and has an intimate and relational knowledge of God.

It is only when they ask that Jesus gives his friends the insight, the gift which the whole world needs, as he models a way to frame their listening that starts with God's accessibility and desire for intimacy. God would

like them to be so close, so comfortable in his companionship that they call him *daddy*. Put another way, Jesus, in word and actions, lets his friends know that what God wants most is to be with them.

In Matthew's version of this passage, Jesus reminds those listening that there is no need to *keep on babbling, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*. Here in Luke's account, Jesus instructs, alongside the only words he believes are needed, a pattern of asking and seeking (listening) through a story or parable, which might seem complicated because the cultural references are unfamiliar. Middle Eastern hospitality laws carried with them an obligation to provide regardless of the inconvenience. Through this story, Jesus is simply encouraging boldness, a search that refuses to give up.

I think the key lessons for me from our readings today, the understanding at the heart of this year's call to prayer, is the significance of our responsibility as Christians to be examples of people who refuse to give up finding and responding to God's frequency. Jesus demonstrates the perfection Eli and his sons had forgotten, repeatedly showing his friends that listening and regularly making space to pray matter. He is immediately ready with a response when his friends ask because he is consistently tuning into what God is doing in his life and theirs. When they ask he offers a simple framework by which they can know God themselves – words for the journey. He emphasises that listening is important and makes seeking simple by using stories and a summary to help his friends understand and remember. In doing so, Jesus models how we can be the answer to our prayers, by setting an example of how to help friends take their place in God's plan and ensure that God's will is done and God's Kingdom takes another step closer to full realisation.

In the gap between Ascension and Pentecost, those first friends of Jesus put into action the example he had set them. The response they received was not only an outpouring of the Holy Spirit the comforter, friend, and guide Jesus promised would come to help them continue his work, but also the Lord *added to their number daily those who were being saved*.

So, what are we waiting for... let's set our five an example as we get busy praying for them to know the best of all is, God is with us!

StF 58 - Lord, I come before your throne of grace

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| 1) Lord, I come before Your throne of grace;
I find rest in Your presence and fullness of joy.
In worship and wonder I behold Your face,
Singing what a faithful God have I. | 2) Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry;
Through the storm You're the beacon,
My song in the night.
In the shelter of Your wings,
Hear my heart's reply,
Singing what a faithful God have I. |
| Ch) <i>What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God.
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.</i> | 3) Lord all sovereign, granting peace from heaven,
Let me comfort those who suffer
With the comfort You have given.
I will tell of Your great love for as long as I live,
Singing what a faithful God have I. |

Robert & Dawn Critchley © 1989 Thankyou Music

Prayers of Intercession

Our intercessions focus on the five people known to us and on our desire that God will change us and use us to help them tune into God's frequency and be transformed by God's love. To help us as we pray, we're going to use our hands, which conveniently have four fingers and a thumb – one for each of our chosen five! God is so good!

Begin by placing one palm up on your lap, and as we begin to pray, use a finger from your other hand to slowly and purposefully trace a circle on your palm. As you begin to trace the circle, recognise that God, who created all things, who has a plan for each of us, a plan to prosper us and bring us peace, is present in this very moment. As you keep tracing the circle, listen for God's voice and feel the depth of love that God,

who died, so that your sins could be washed away, has for you. As you continue to trace the circle, ask God to complete you, to make you whole, to use you as Christ's hands and feet today, so that your life reveals that same love in ways that enable your five friends to hear God and to know God with them for themselves.

Now let your finger travel from the circle to your thumb, and then each of your fingers in turn. As it does so, think of each of your five friends. Name them before God and pray for the Holy Spirit to come into their lives as their friend, comforter and guide, transforming them and enabling them to know God with them in their joys and sorrows. Then let your finger trace your whole hand, as if you were drawing around it, as you do, listen and make space for God to speak. Maybe God has a word or an action by which you might help your five hear God's call for what it is, or which might encourage them to listen to it.

Pause

Heavenly Father, who calls us all by name, it is our heartfelt prayer that the five for whom we each pray might know the presence of your Holy, life-giving Spirit within them and, in turning to you, might listen and hear their name. We pray because we know that listening will change not only their lives but will bring thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven, and all that promises your world, closer. If we can help our five hear and respond, we pray that you will make us bold enough to react to your Spirit guiding us in what to do or say. For it is in the name of Jesus, we pray. **Amen.**

Offertory

As we listen to your voice and feel the power of your Spirit within and around us, so we become increasingly aware of the enormity of all that you offer to us. In responding to the depth, width and height of your love for us and all whom we know and love, we bring these our offerings in return and with them we bring ourselves. We desire that in and through all that we do and say, the world may hear of your glory and be inspired to listen and hear for themselves of the wonder that is God with us, the same today, tomorrow and forevermore. **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.**

Our final hymn was written by Thomas Chisholm, who, despite a prolonged period of struggle, remained able to "tune in" to God's presence during his trials. His words allow us to sing for all to hear for themselves, of the faithfulness of God, who promises to always be with those who listen and believe in the power of Jesus.

StF 51 – Great is thy faithfulness

1) Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with thee
Thou changest not, thy compassions
they fail not;
As thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

*Ch) Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.*

2) Summer and winter, and springtime
and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

3) Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope
for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Thomas O Chisholm

Blessing

Loving God, we go as your people, called by name, restored by your grace, bearing your name on our lips, hearing your word, seeing your love in our lives. May we be so in tune with you that those we know and meet will give thanks to God and their lives to Christ, that your will might be done and your kingdom come.

Amen.