

18th November 2026 – Morning Service

Made in the Image of God

Megan Ashmore

Call to Worship: Psalm 15

LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain?

The one whose way of life is blameless,

who does what is righteous,

who speaks the truth from their heart;

whose tongue utters no slander,

who does no wrong to a neighbour,

and casts no slur on others;

who despises a vile person

but honours those who fear the LORD;

who keeps an oath even when it hurts,

and does not change their mind;

who lends money to the poor without interest;

who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.

Whoever does these things

will never be shaken.

Prayer of Adoration and Thanks

In your presence, there is comfort. In your presence there is peace. When we seek your heart, we find blessed assurance that we are loved and forgiven and free. Heavenly Father, we thank you that by your grace we are able to enter into your presence – for it is not through any goodness of our own. You are holy and we are sinners. And yet in your great love and mercy you welcome us to be inheritors of your kingdom, offering eternal life and all our days spent with you. Teach us how to walk with integrity, truthfulness, humility, and grace, that in your strength, we may bring forth godly works of righteousness for your name's sake. May our actions and attitudes reflect the characteristics that are pleasing in your sight. This we ask in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

StF 94 – To God be the glory

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| 1) To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in: | 2) O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives: |
| Ch) <i>Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
and give him the glory –
great things he has done!</i> | 3) Great things he has taught us,
great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see: |

Frances Jane van Alstyne

CMP 239 – Holy, holy, holy is the Lord

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|---|--|
| 1) Holy, holy, holy is the Lord;
holy is the Lord God almighty!
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord;
holy is the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come!
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord! | 3) Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lord;
worthy is the Lord God almighty!
Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lord;
worthy is the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come!
Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lord! |
| 2) Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is the Lord;
Jesus is the Lord God almighty!
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is the Lord;
Jesus is the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come!
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is the Lord! | 4) Glory, glory, glory to the Lord;
glory to the Lord God almighty!
Glory, glory, glory to the Lord;
glory to the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come!
Glory, glory, glory to the Lord! |

Author unknown

Introduction to the reading

I wonder if you have a coin about your person. Not many of us do these days. Though it is always useful to have a bit of change for the car park, or to flip to make a decision. If you do have a coin to hand, take it out and look at it. On one side – which we call heads – there is an image of our monarch – past or present. On the other side – tails – the value of the coin is indicated, alongside various national, regional and commemorative designs. The new coins issued by King Charles depict Britain's flora and fauna, designed to show the importance and precariousness of the natural world. UK coinage features the inscription "By the Grace of God, King, Defender of the Faith" around the portrait of the monarch and higher value coins also include an edge inscription, which on the new coins reads, "In the service of all".

It is a coin that is at the forefront of today's gospel reading which we hear from the book of Matthew.

Reading: Matthew 22: 15-22 (NIV)

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the poll-tax to Caesar or not?'

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'

'Caesar's,' they replied.

Then he said to them, 'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'

When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Reflection

Before we get to the coin, let's investigate what's going on here. The Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, are out to get Jesus. According to Matthew's record of events, it was just the day before this that Jesus had cleared out the temple, accusing the authorities of making his father's house a den of robbers. Now Jesus is back, teaching in the temple. Using parables, he is revealing the way of the kingdom of heaven, and those in authority are feeling uncomfortable. They challenge Jesus by asking, "By what authority are you doing these things?" Jesus answers them with a question which they admit they cannot answer. And "when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him."

Matthew tells us that the Pharisees sent their disciples alongside the Herodians. The theologian William Barclay in his commentary of this passage explains this partnership:

The seriousness of this attack is shown by the fact that the Pharisees and the Herodians combined to make it, for normally these two parties were in bitter opposition. The Pharisees were the supremely orthodox, who resented the payment of the tax to a foreign king as an infringement of the divine right of God. The Herodians were the party of Herod, king of Galilee, who owed his power to the Romans and who worked hand in glove with them. The Pharisees and the Herodians were strange bed-fellows indeed; their differences were for the moment forgotten in a common hatred of Jesus and a common desire to eliminate him.

From the reading, we get a clear impression that this team of delegates had planned their approach. They begin by addressing Jesus as teacher and then proceed to flatter him in an attempt to make Jesus discredit himself when they finally pose their query. Even the question is formed as a trick to further enhance their opportunity to catch Jesus out and give them cause to charge him in some way. "Tell us then," they say, "what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

Sit with me a moment in the meeting when these two groups came together to formulate the plan. Hear them discussing the outcome: "We've got him this time. If he says "yes" then he'll be paying honour to Caesar, and the people won't like that. That will stop him in his tracks and he'll hopefully disappear without the interest of the crowds. If he says "no" then he'll be rebelling against the authorities and they'll sort him out on our behalf. This plot can't fail...."

How wrong they were, of course. Jesus addressed their query with a measured answer which threw the spotlight on the behaviour of those questioning him. "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's" they replied. Then he said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." In other words, give back to the Roman ruler that which is determined by the authority as a means of paying for what you receive from them, but give to God everything else. As a coin bears the image of a leader and therefore belongs to the state, so we bear the image of God and belong to Him.

We hear a lot about image these days – various forms of media claim they can help create an image for a business; adverts tell us how products can preserve or improve our image; while many larger businesses and brands seek to promote themselves through a famous face of the company. Our eldest granddaughter started secondary school last month. When we were with her in the summer she modelled her new uniform for us, which includes the school logo. She is going to a newly established school which means her year group will be the only one in attendance for this first year. As a result, the pupils will be carrying a great weight on their shoulders as they represent this school in the community. They will present an image of the school's ethos as they walk to and from school.

So what does it mean that we are made in God's image? From the book of Ezekiel we read, "God said, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."" (Ezekiel 36: 26-27)

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4: 24)

And similarly in his letter to the Colossians, he writes, "and put on the new self, which is being renewed in the image of its creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all of these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3: 10-14)

Being made in the image of God means having a heart of love; a heart of compassion; a heart for forgiveness; a heart of unity. It means surrendering to His will and way. It means living righteous and holy lives. Jesus himself said, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13: 34-35)

Like my granddaughter and her peers representing their new school in the community, so we represent God in today's world. By living in God's image, we give Him the glory and the thanks He deserves. We give Him our service as we care for His creation. And we give Him our love as we grow in relationship with God and one another. I'm giving a preview of next week's gospel reading with this next passage, but it sums up perfectly what we are required to give God. Of course it does, they are more words of Jesus:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second one is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22: 34 – 40)

What image are we projecting to the world? Does it need improving? How do we preserve the image of God in a modern, technological world?

Our next hymn throws up more questions about how we portray God's image in our everyday lives...

StF 662 – Have you heard God's voice

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|---|---|
| 1) Have you heard God's voice;
has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow? | 3) In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat,
and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless? |
| Ch) <i>Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?</i> | 4) Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? |
| 2) Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent? | Ch) <i>We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.</i> |

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Introduction to the reading

I recently bought a new book called "And the Trees of the Field – Thirty biblical reflections to restore your soul." Day one begins with Psalm one and the tree planted by the water's edge, which flourishes because it is rooted near living water. The author of the book reflects on this psalm and then suggests that the reader choose another short psalm to read every day for a week. Of the recommended other psalms, I opted for Psalm 15, which we read earlier, and quickly realised how easily I fail at representing God and His kingdom values. It is a tall order, but the Old Testament reading for today reminds us that we are not alone in facing the challenges of daily living. Moses, having received the ten commandments from God, comes back down the mountain to find the Israelites have made an idol – a golden calf. In the verses that follow Moses enquires of God if He will still go with them on their journey...

Reading: Exodus 33: 12-23 (NIV)

Moses said to the LORD, 'You have been telling me, "Lead these people," but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, "I know you by name and you have found favour with me." If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people.'

The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'

Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?'

And the LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.'

Then Moses said, 'Now show me your glory.'

And the LORD said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.'

Then the LORD said, 'There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.'

Reflection

Moses really did have his work cut out with those rebellious Israelites; but he sought God's face in everything he did. And God was with them in all their travels as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God had compassion on the Israelites – even though they messed up. Reflecting God's image is not always an easy thing to do and we can mess up all too often. But God loves us so much he gave us Jesus, His own son – Emmanuel – God with us. Jesus is our pattern for living. But he is also our salvation from sin. He lived in this world. He experienced the trials, accusations, injustices, hatred and hurt. Yet he was free from sin and able therefore to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus died and rose again for us. We must strive to live out kingdom values which give the glory to God. But when we go awry, we know that if we turn back to God and seek His forgiveness through Jesus, He will have mercy on us.

Look at your coin again. See the picture of the monarch. May that be a daily reminder to you that Jesus is the King of Kings, who paid the ultimate price of sacrifice "in the service of all," that we might have eternal life. **Amen.**

Our next song is a hymn of praise, a prayer of confession and a commitment to serve.

StF 331 – King of Kings, Majesty

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| 1) King of Kings, majesty,
God of heaven living in me.
Gentle Saviour, closest Friend,
Strong Deliverer, Beginning and End,
all within me falls at your throne. | 2) Earth and heaven worship you,
Love eternal, faithful and true,
who bought the nations, ransomed souls,
brought this sinner near to your throne;
all within me cries out in praise. |
|---|---|
- Ch) *Your majesty, I can but bow;
I lay my all before you now.
In royal robes I don't deserve,
I live to serve your majesty.*

Jarrold Cooper © 1996 Sovereign Lifestyle Music Ltd

Prayers of Confession and Intercession

Caesar, did you create the stars, hurl them to the reaches of the universe; did you issue rules that keep the planets in place? Can you make blood course through our veins? Or craft an otter or a moonflower? Then keep your coins. They can't buy what we need. God, it is your face we see in our world, our very selves, our breath and love. We owe every single thing to you. Claim it all. Claim us. Please take us as your own.

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Lord, we are sorry for the times we have failed you in thought and word and deed. **Forgive us we pray.**

We confess that we have often opted for the easy way of life when the narrow path was the true path of righteousness. **Forgive us we pray.**

We admit that we like the comforts of life and sometimes hold on to that which we could share or need to give up in order to walk closer with you. **Forgive us we pray.**

Moses said, "I'm not an eloquent speaker." But God, you said, "I will help you speak and teach you what to say." We make excuses for things we don't want to. **Forgive us we pray.**

Lord, help us to reflect your image. Renew us through your mercy; by the grace of your son Jesus accept our prayer of confession, and in the strength of the Spirit may we live our lives to the glory of your Holy name. **Amen.**

Place coin on hand – heads up

Lord God, as we look at this coin we pray for all those in positions of authority. Grant them wisdom and understanding that they may lead with integrity and that outcomes of decisions will be built on fairness and justice for all.

As we turn our coin over, we pray for those who live in the shadows of society, rejected because of their colour, age, gender, sexuality, disability. We ask for a blessing on charities and individuals who stand up for your people. Grant them your wisdom to fight on with courage and determination, knowing that you lead and support them in every move they make. Make us bolder too, as your church, to step out and speak up for those whose voices are drowned out by the big noises of this world.

We turn our coin back and pray for those who guide, teach and lead your people – ministers, local preachers, worship leaders, stewards, teachers and for all those who live out your teaching in their daily lives, reflecting your love wherever they are. Send your spirit upon them that they may be renewed in their work of serving you and filled with joy and enthusiasm to share the good news of the gospel.

But we remember on the other side our brothers and sisters living in fear; those who are persecuted for their faith; Hear all those who call out to you in distress. Comfort and strengthen them; calm them and protect them; and give them hope.

We turn our coin back to the monarch's head and pray for our world – for the beauty of creation and the wonder of life. We pray for all our brothers and sisters in Christ and give thanks that when we go to bed others will begin their day and worship you, so that there will be an unending song of praise to you Heavenly Father.

But Lord, we know that this world is not as you want it to be. We turn the coin over and pray for those living in countries torn apart by war; and those struggling to survive in places where there is famine and disease. We know that often our lives have an impact on theirs and so we pray that we might make good choices in our daily living, that what we buy, how we travel and what we do will not be harmful to others.

Compassionate Father, we turn our coin back and acknowledge you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We know that you will hear our prayers and answer them; and so we bring before you all those on our hearts this morning and in particular we pray for members of this church who are unable to be with us here. May they know your presence and peace.

Accept these prayers for the sake of your dear son who taught us when we pray to say:

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 418 – We have a gospel to proclaim

- 1) We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.
- 2) Tell of his birth at Bethlehem –
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.
- 3) Tell of his death at Calvary:
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.
- 4) Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.
- 5) Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.
- 6) Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

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Offertory prayer

Jesus said: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's."
All we have and all we are have come from God. So let us worship Him with these offerings of money, that they may be used to further the work of the kingdom here in this place. We take this moment to give back our lives too to the one who created us, loves us and provides for all our needs. **Amen.**

Blessing

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. **Amen.**