

# 19<sup>th</sup> June 2022 – Morning Service

Who do you say that I am?

Olwen Meller

## Call to Worship

The theme for our service this morning is ‘Who do you say that I am?’ Jesus asked the apostles ‘Who do people say that I am?’ and the same question is asked of each one of us. Who is Jesus for me? And if I believe in him, what difference does it make to the way I live my life?

## StF 25 – God is here

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| 1) God is here! As we his people<br>Meet to offer praise and prayer,<br>May we find in fuller measure<br>What it is in Christ we share.<br>Here, as in the world around us,<br>All our varied skills and arts<br>Wait the coming of his Spirit<br>Into open minds and hearts.     | 3) Here our children find a welcome<br>In the Shepherd's flock and fold;<br>Here as bread and wine are taken,<br>Christ sustains us, as of old;<br>Here the servants of the Servant<br>Seek in worship to explore<br>What it means in daily living<br>To believe and to adore.     |
| 2) Here are symbols to remind us<br>Of our lifelong need of grace;<br>Here are table, font, and pulpit;<br>Here the cross has central place.<br>Here in honesty of preaching,<br>Here in silence, as in speech,<br>Here, in newness and renewal,<br>God the Spirit comes to each. | 4) Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom,<br>In an age of change and doubt,<br>Keep us faithful to the gospel,<br>Help us work your purpose out.<br>Here, in this day's dedication,<br>All we have to give, receive:<br>We, who cannot live without you,<br>We adore you! We believe! |

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*CCL No. 515642*

## Opening Prayers

God, three in one and one in three, we seek you in faith and worship you.

Creator, you made us in your image

Christ, you saved us from our sin,

Spirit, you live and move in us.

All-encompassing, eternal God, hear our prayer and give us your blessing.

No words, living God, can describe you, define you, or capture you. You are more than all human language; you are beyond human understanding, yet we glimpse you in the majesty of the universe; we sense you in the wonder of birth; we feel you in the beauty of nature.

Then, in Jesus, you show us your face, clearer than we ever deserved, a face which smiles upon us, eyes which weep with us, lips which speak forgiveness, arms which reach out to welcome us. And that is just the beginning. You never stop disclosing your purpose to us. By your Spirit you move among us, producing unity and community, gifts of faith, hope and love.

Three in one God, three things we ask of you: that we may see you more clearly in the world around us, in the need of our neighbours, in the social and political events of history. May we love you more dearly in the delight of worship and devotion, in the challenge of service, in the enthusiasm with which we tell people about you. May we follow you more nearly into the places where people are struggling for justice, into the wilderness of people's grief and pain, into the situations where peace is absent.

Three-in-one God, strengthen and sustain us as we seek to be your people day by day. **Amen**

## Prayer of Confession

Heavenly Father, we lower our heads before you and we confess that we have too often forgotten that we are yours. Sometimes we carry on our lives as if there was no God and we fall short of being a credible witness to You. For these things we ask your forgiveness and we also ask for your strength. Give us clear minds and open hearts so we may witness to You in our world. Remind us to be who You would have us be regardless of what we are doing or who we are with. Hold us to You and build our relationship with You and with those You have given us on earth. **Amen**

## StF 322 – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

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| 1) How sweet the name of Jesus sounds<br>In a believer's ear!<br>It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,<br>And drives away our fear.          | 4) Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,<br>My Prophet, Priest, and King,<br>My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,<br>Accept the praise I bring. |
| 2) It makes the wounded spirit whole,<br>And calms the troubled breast;<br>'Tis manna to the hungry soul,<br>And to the weary, rest.             | 5) Weak is the effort of my heart,<br>And cold my warmest thought;<br>But when I see thee as thou art,<br>I'll praise thee as I ought.      |
| 3) Dear name - the rock on which I build,<br>My shield and hiding-place,<br>My never-failing treasury, filled<br>With boundless stores of grace! | 6) Till then I would thy love proclaim<br>With every fleeting breath;<br>And may the music of thy name<br>Refresh my soul in death.         |

*John Newton CCL No. 515642*

## Reading: Luke 9:18 - 24

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'God's Messiah.'

Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.' Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.'

## Reflection

Here Jesus raises the question as to what people were saying about him. The apostles, having just returned from their missionary tour, have been in closer touch with public opinion than he. Who do people say the Son of Man is? This is the most important question in the Gospel because it concerns the identity of Jesus. Get this wrong and we get everything else wrong. Get this right and there is a good chance we will get everything else right.

Jesus knew who he was - He asked the question for the benefit of the disciples. Questions help people clarify their thinking. Jesus didn't just pluck the question out of the air, the question was on everybody's lips - Who is this Jesus? In answer to his question, the apostles told Jesus that some said he was John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others one of the ancient prophets come back to life. All of these answers contained an element of truth but still they didn't explain the mystery of Jesus. But then Jesus turned to the apostles and said 'And you, who do you say that I am?', and Peter answered 'You are God's Messiah.'

At least Peter was on the right track but he too was wide of the mark. Jesus was indeed the Messiah but he was much more than that. The apostles didn't fully grasp the mystery of Jesus until after the resurrection; Jesus is both the Messiah and the Son of God. This is the core of faith on which the Church was founded. But that didn't end the question for all time. In the early centuries of Christianity various controversies arose. Various heresies denied either the humanity or the divinity of Jesus and this had to be settled in various Councils of the Church.

The question is still alive today. Today it is fashionable to regard Jesus as just one of the great religious founders. We need to constantly remind ourselves of what we believe about Jesus. It is easier today for us to profess the faith - we have 2,000 years of tradition to guide us. But it is important to make the answer our own. We need to believe, not simply because the Church says so, but out of our own personal conviction. Each of us must face the question posed by Jesus - Who do you think that I am?

The more people we have in the Church who believe out of personal conviction, the more the Church will be founded upon a rock. But even though it is important to be able to profess the true faith, that is only the beginning. We must live out the faith. Whether we are conscious of it or not, all of us are shaped by our convictions and we must allow our lives to be shaped by the faith.

### **StF 661 – Give me the faith which can remove**

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| 1) Give me the faith which can remove<br>And sink the mountain to a plain;<br>Give me the childlike praying love,<br>Which longs to build thy house again;<br>Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,<br>And all my simple soul devour. | 3) My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,<br>Into thy blessed hands receive;<br>And let me live to preach thy word,<br>And let me to thy glory live;<br>My every sacred moment spend<br>In publishing the sinners' friend.             |
| 2) I would the precious time redeem,<br>And longer live for this alone:<br>To spend, and to be spent, for them<br>Who have not yet my Saviour known;<br>Fully on these my mission prove,<br>And only breathe, to breathe thy love.   | 4) Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart<br>With boundless charity divine:<br>So shall I all my strength exert,<br>And love them with a zeal like thine;<br>And lead them to thy open side,<br>The sheep for whom their Shepherd died. |

*Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642*

### **Reading: Galatians 3:23- 29**

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

### **Reflection**

Who do people say that I am? We could put the question this way: 'What do people think of me?' or 'How do people see me?' However we phrase it, it is a challenging question. It's a question that many people ask but especially those who are in the public eye. Some people are obsessed with how other people see them, they hunger for approval and this could be disastrous for people elected to public office. It could mean selling one's soul to the highest bidder.

When Jesus asked the apostles 'Who do people say that I am?' he wasn't asking it for his own sake - He was asking it for their sake. He was sure of who he was. He had such extraordinary self-possession that he was able to face both adulation and hostility with utter calmness.

We need to find our own reality so that we can stand on our own two feet, then we won't need to be propped up by others. There are people who have a steady flame shining from deep inside them. This is not extinguished when others criticise or ignore them because it's not dependent on what others think of them; it is what they think of themselves that matters.

But sometimes, to see ourselves as others see us can be a salutary thing. Alfred Nobel, a Swedish industrialist, was rich and famous. He had invented dynamite but as he neared the end of his life he was extremely unhappy. He had never married and all his life he had been plagued by ill health and as a result he had a pessimistic view of life. Then, one morning he read his own obituary in a newspaper. It had been a mistake by a journalist. He was very disturbed by what he read. What hurt him most was the false image that people had of him. The world knew him as 'The dynamite king' and that's how he would be remembered. There was no mention in his obituary of his desire to unite people and to better the quality of human life. It came as a great shock to him that everything that was essential, everything that made up the kernel of himself, was hidden from other people and all that was false in him was revealed. He felt completely misunderstood. He made a decision to take immediate action to let the world know what his true ideals and aims were. He decided to leave most of his vast fortune in trust for the betterment of the world. He set up five prizes that would be awarded to men and women who had made outstanding contributions in the areas of physics, chemistry, medicine, literature and peace. He wanted to be remembered, not as the man who had invented something capable of blowing up the world, but as a man who had the good of humanity deeply at heart.

What happened to Nobel shows us how wrong people can be in their judgment of a person. It happened to Jesus himself. Today's Gospel reading shows us what crazy ideas some people had about him. Some thought he was John the Baptist - already dead - and others thought he was one of the ancient prophets come back to life. Jesus was the Messiah - as Peter correctly said - but he was not to be a glorious Messiah as people expected. He was to be a suffering one. He wouldn't rule - He would serve. Jesus wasn't interested in projecting the kind of image people wanted. He knew that he had a God-given destiny to fulfil and he wouldn't be deflected from it.

We are in trouble if our main concern is to project a good image and to live up to other people's expectations. The only thing that we are called to be is to be true to ourselves but we should not be content until we are the best that we can be. So whatever our path in life, what really matters is that we should be ourselves before God and before others. As our reading from Galatians tells us - In Christ Jesus we are all children of God.

### **StF 272 – From heaven you came**

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| 1) From heaven You came, helpless babe,<br>Entered our world, Your glory veiled;<br>Not to be served but to serve,<br>And give Your life that we might live.   | 3) Come see His hands and His feet,<br>The scars that speak of sacrifice,<br>Hands that flung stars into space<br>To cruel nails surrendered. |
| <i>Ch) This is our God, the servant King,<br/>He calls us now to follow Him<br/>To bring our lives as a daily offering<br/>Of worship to the servant King.</i> | 4) So let us learn how to serve,<br>And in our lives enthrone Him,<br>Each other's needs to prefer<br>For it is Christ we're serving.         |
| 2) There in the garden of tears,<br>My heavy load He chose to bear;<br>His heart with sorrow was torn,<br>'Yet not my will but Yours', He said.                |   |

## Prayers of Intercession

Jesus, the suffering Messiah, understands our struggles. Therefore we can be confident that he will listen to our prayers.

For all Christians that they may not be afraid to profess publicly their faith in Jesus Christ

L: Let us pray to the Lord   **R: Lord hear our prayer**

For those who hold public office that they may be true to their responsibilities

L: Let us pray to the Lord   **R: Lord hear our prayer**

For all those who suffer for their belief in Christ that they may have the courage to persevere

L: Let us pray to the Lord   **R: Lord hear our prayer**

For those who have left the Church that they may find their way back to Christ's flock

L: Let us pray to the Lord   **R: Lord hear our prayer**

For all gathered here that we may find joy in the profession of our faith and that the depth of our faith may be evident in the way that we live

L: Let us pray to the Lord   **R: Lord hear our prayer**

For our deceased relatives and friends that they may share Christ's glory in heaven

L: Let us pray to the Lord   **R: Lord hear our prayer**

For our own special needs, and the needs of those known to us . . . .

L: Let us pray to the Lord   **R: Lord hear our prayer**

Father, without your grace we falter. Help us to follow your Son faithfully on earth and come to share his glory in heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

**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 8 – God with us, Creator, Father**

- 1) God with us: Creator, Father,  
Bringing everything to birth;  
Mother of the whole creation,  
Fire of stars and life of earth:  
Down the countless years composing,  
From the earth's evolving night,  
Love's response to love, and forming  
Mind and soul to seek your light.
- 2) God with us: Redeemer, Brother,  
Friend for ever at our side,  
Here, in flesh, you walked among us,  
Taking up your cross, you died.  
Crucified, despised, rejected,  
Perfect Love, who shared our shame,  
Streaming from the cross, your judgement,  
Full of mercy, clears our name.
- 3) God with us: Unwearied Spirit,  
From the birth of time and space,  
Surging through unconscious being,  
Joyful, Life-Creating Grace:  
Through the centuries you find us;  
You, as God, inspire our prayer;  
Life and Power at work within us,  
Love for ever, everywhere!
- 4) God, Transcendent, far beyond us,  
Closest Friend, unfailing Guide:  
Through the ages, wronged, affronted,  
In your poor, still crucified!  
God with us: convict, forgive us;  
By your holy love destroy  
All that hinders peace and justice:  
Fill this aching world with joy!

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## **Blessing**

May your faith be sure because it is founded on the Word of God and the person of Christ.

May your faith be strong so that it will withstand doubt and uncertainty

May your faith be joyful because it is a gift from God

And may your faith be active, manifesting itself in service of those in need.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and for evermore.

**Amen.**