

# 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023 – Morning Service

## By what authority?

Rev Chris Watson

### Call to Worship

Teach me your ways and make them known to me.

Teach me to live according to your truth.

Teach me to put my hope in you all day

### StF 347 – Crown him with many crowns

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|---|---|
| 1) Crown him with many crowns,<br>The Lamb upon his throne;<br>Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns<br>All music but its own.<br>Awake, my soul, and sing<br>Of him who died for thee,<br>And hail him as thy matchless King<br>Through all eternity.             | 4) Crown him the Lord of peace,<br>Whose power a sceptre sways<br>From pole to pole, that wars may cease,<br>Absorbed in prayer and praise.<br>His reign shall know no end,<br>And round his pierced feet<br>Fair flowers of paradise extend<br>Their fragrance ever sweet. |
| 2) Crown him the Son of God,<br>Before the worlds began;<br>And ye, who tread where he has trod,<br>Crown him the Son of Man,<br>Who every grief has known<br>That wrings the human breast,<br>And takes and bears them for his own,<br>That all in him may rest. | 5) Crown him the Lord of love;<br>Behold his hands and side -<br>Rich wounds, yet visible above,<br>In beauty glorified.<br>All hail, Redeemer, hail!<br>For thou hast died for me;<br>Thy praise and glory shall not fail<br>Throughout eternity.                          |
| 3) Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave,<br>And rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save.<br>His glories now we sing, who died, and rose on high;<br>Who died, eternal life to bring, and lives, that death may die.           |   |

*Matthew Bridges & Godfrey Thring*

### Prayer of Approach and Confession

O God who called the world into being, who calls us to follow Christ; close our minds to distractions around us, open our ears to hear your call, open our hearts to receive your love, and open our eyes to the needs of our community. Help us to find space in our worship to hear voice, to feel your presence and to know your love.

For those times when we have blamed others' actions: Gracious God; **forgive us.**

For those times when we have acted from selfish ambition: Gracious God; **forgive us.**

For those times when we have been conceited: Gracious God; **forgive us.**

For those times when we have regarded ourselves as better than others: Gracious God; **forgive us.**

For those times when we have looked only to our own interests: Gracious God; **forgive us.**

In silence we remember those times when we have fallen short of the example that Jesus set for us.

[Silence]

Gracious God; **forgive us.**

It is God who is at work in us and we are assured that our sins are indeed forgiven if we truly repent. **Amen**

## Reading: Ezekiel 18 : 1-4, 25-32

The word of the Lord came to me: 'What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child – both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.'

'Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is not just." Hear, you Israelites: is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offences they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die. Yet the Israelites say, "The way of the Lord is not just." Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offences; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!'

## StF 437 – When the music fades

1) When the music fades,  
All is stripped away,  
And I simply come;  
Longing just to bring  
Something that's of worth  
That will bless Your heart.

*Ch) I'm coming back to the heart of worship,  
And it's all about You,  
All about You, Jesus.  
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,  
When it's all about You,  
All about You, Jesus.*

*Pre- I'll bring You more than a song,  
Ch) For a song in itself  
Is not what You have required.  
You search much deeper within  
Through the way things appear;  
You're looking into my heart.*

2) King of endless worth,  
No one could express  
How much You deserve.  
Though I'm weak and poor,  
All I have is Yours,  
Every single breath.

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## Reading: Matthew 21 : 23-32

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you this authority?' Jesus replied, 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?' They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will ask, "Then why didn't you believe him?" But if we say, "Of human origin" – we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.' Then he said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

'What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard." "I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?' 'The first,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'

## StF 523 – It's me, it's me

Ch) *It's me, it's me, O Lord,  
Standing in the need of prayer.  
It's me, it's me, O Lord,  
Standing in the need of prayer.*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) Not my mother or my father, but it's me, O Lord,<br>Standing in the need of prayer;<br>Not my mother or my father, but it's me, O Lord,<br>Standing in the need of prayer.                   | 2) Not my brother or my sister, but it's me, O Lord,<br>Standing in the need of prayer;<br>Not my brother or my sister, but it's me, O Lord,<br>Standing in the need of prayer. |
| 3) Not the stranger or my neighbour,<br>but it's me, O Lord,<br>Standing in the need of prayer;<br>Not the stranger or my neighbour,<br>but it's me, O Lord,<br>Standing in the need of prayer. |   |

*African-American Traditional*

## Sermon

The reading from Matthew's Gospel comes just after the event we know as Jesus cleansing the Temple. As you may recall, Jesus had gone into the Temple and had literally gone on the rampage, he had overturned tables of the money changers, and those selling doves, he had driven out all those buying and selling in the Temple. Whilst he was doing this he had quoted scripture saying *"It is written 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' but you have made it a den of robbers"*. Those religious leaders, the chief priests and elders who were responsible for running the show questioned the right of Jesus to disrupt the trading of the temple. They were the ones with the authority and so they call into question Jesus' behaviour because it challenged the status quo.

I may be in the minority here but I can see where they were coming from. How would you feel if someone were to come here today and say "You're doing everything wrong" wouldn't you want to know by whose authority they were acting? So they ask him by what authority and who gave him this authority?

Jesus in true rabbinic style answered their question with a question of his own. *'John's baptism was it from God or from men?'* Was John acting with God's approval or was he literally just a voice crying out in the wilderness, was he sent from God or not? John had been regarded as a prophet by the ordinary people so whichever answer the authorities gave they would be in trouble somewhere so they took the easy way out and claimed not to know. Jesus asks those around him this question "What do you think?" and then goes on to tell the story of the two sons.

The first son refused to do as he was asked but then changed his mind, whilst the second son immediately agreed but didn't actually do anything. So the first obeyed the second didn't. I wonder which one we are most like. Do we say 'Yes, Lord I'll follow you, obey you, live the Christian life, bear witness to the world about you'. Do we become very involved in church life, a leading light within those walls, but then in our ordinary non - Sunday life live exactly as everyone around us does? Or do we sit in church looking bored not involved much in church life but outside of church bear witness by our lives, the way we live, the things we say and do make us different to those around us.

Pious words versus actions. God is not interested in words unless they mean something, we have to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. It is easy to say we will do something - proof is in the pudding, actions speak louder than words, how we live, what we do as well as what we say. Our words can be at odds with our actions. Each of us is responsible for our own position with God - responsible for our own salvation.

In the book of Ezekiel it says the following: *"The Fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are put on edge"*. Ezekiel was a priest turned prophet who was called by God during the exile of the Israelites in Babylon. He prophesied over a period of around 20 years. The proverb meant that the children suffered because of the actions of generations that had come before them.

The generation that were hearing the words of Ezekiel blamed their ancestors for their exile in Babylon, rightly so, but they accepted no blame for their own actions. Ezekiel says that this no longer holds true and that each individual is responsible for themselves. They could no longer hide behind the concept of God's punishment being laid on future generations, eating sour grapes would now put on edge the teeth of those who consumed them. Now there would be direct consequences for actions.

Each of us have to decide for ourselves what we will do with God, will we accept him or reject him. Our salvation is only valid for ourselves and it must be a conscious decision. It is not enough to come to church because our parents did, or because it is what you do on a Sunday. We must make the decision to ask Christ into our lives, to live through us in a very real way. We can come to church and sing the hymns, listen, pray with everyone else and they can be worshipping and we are not. We can offer the words but if we don't mean them then they become rituals and that is just what God doesn't want. He wants our love, not empty prayers and words. He is not interested in rituals, in things we do every week just by rote. He is interested in the why. He is interested in our obedience, not just the words we speak but the actions we take, how we live our lives everyday and his place in our lives.

Following Jesus involves commitment, being part of His church involves rights but also responsibilities. Being Christian means being a follower of Christ, that is what the word means. A follower is someone who follows not only the person but the teaching and ways of that person. A follower of Christ is someone who not only hears the Word, but obeys it. **Amen**

### **Prayers of Concern**

Just and merciful God, the world needs this new heart and spirit that Ezekiel talks of. The Church needs the attitude that Jesus had so that we too can be faithful, humble and obedient. Jesus lived as a humble human being to show us your way so that people may have life in all its fullness.

We pray for those in power, who have to make difficult decisions which will affect the lives and well-being of many.....

We pray for those who are the victims of warfare of poverty, who are calling out for help.....

We pray for those we know who are ill, anxious or bereaved, who need to be aware of your love.....

We pray for ourselves and the Church, as we face the challenge of Christian living and witness in a secular world and society.....**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 477 – Teach me to dance

*Ch) Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart,  
Teach me to move in the pow'r of Your Spirit.  
Teach me to walk in the light of Your presence,  
Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart.  
Teach me to love with Your heart of compassion  
Teach me to trust in the word of Your promise  
Teach me to hope in the day of Your coming  
Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart.*

2) Let all my movements express  
A heart that loves to say 'Yes',  
A will that leaps to obey You.  
Let all my energy blaze  
To see the joy in Your face  
Let my whole being praise You,  
Praise You.

1) You wrote the rhythm of life,  
Created heaven and earth;  
In You is joy without measure.  
So like a child in Your sight,  
I dance to see Your delight  
For I was made for Your pleasure,  
Pleasure.

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## Blessing

Help us to follow your way; to obey your teaching; to trust in you. Bless us now and always. **Amen**