

20th October, 2024 - Morning Worship

Bob Allaway

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Call to worship: To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. [1 Tim. 1: 17] Let us praise him as we sing:

StF 55 - Immortal, invisible, God only wise [*in modernised version, with v5 restored:*]

1) Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious,
the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious,
your great name we praise.

2) Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting,
you rule us in might;
your justice like mountains
high soaring above
your clouds which are fountains
of goodness and love.

3) To all life you give, Lord,
to both great and small;
in all life you live, Lord, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish, uncertain and frail,
we wither and perish; but you never fail.

4) Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
your angels adore you, all veiling their sight;
our praises we render, O Father, to you
whom only the splendour
of light hides from view.

5) But, though you're above
what our thinking can scan,
you show us your love in the life of a Man,
and so may your glorious Spirit impart,
through Christ in the story,
your Christ to the heart.

*Walter Chalmers Smith. 1824-1908,
v5 Bob Allaway, based on original,*

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Opening prayer

Holy God, how can we even begin to worship you?

When we think of the vast tracts of time and space,
the smaller and smaller components of matter,
the interweaving complexities of life:
it is more than our minds can grasp.

How much more beyond our comprehension must you be,
who brought it all into being:
greater than any words of ours could express.

Yet you show us a human face in Jesus Christ,
you let us pray to you as Abba, Dad,
you draw us into your embrace by your Spirit,
with a love greater even than a mother's for her child.

Our wonder before your grace exceeds even
what we feel before your creation.

As we hear the reading of your Word now,
help us acknowledge our misuse of your creation
and receive the forgiveness you offer us in Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen

Reading: Job 38: 1-7 (*This and the following could be split between two readers*)

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

'Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?

Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

Reading: Job 38: 34-41

'Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water?

Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, "Here we are"?

Who gives the ibis wisdom or gives the cockerel understanding?

Who has the wisdom to count the clouds? Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens when the dust becomes hard and the clods of earth stick together?

Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions
when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket?

Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God
and wander about for lack of food?

This section of Job shows us a panorama of God's creation, that is of concern to God, even when it is of no use to, or even endangers, humanity. Let us acknowledge God as creator of all things as we *all* share in *the 2nd Collect for today*:

**Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth
and formed us in your own image. Teach us to discern your hand in all your works,
and to serve you with reverence and thanksgiving;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
supreme over all creation, now and for ever. Amen.**

We find a similar appreciation of God's creation in all its breadth in our psalm for today: **Ps 104**, but we are going to *sing* that Psalm, turned into the familiar hymn: **StF 113 - O worship the King**

1) O worship the King, all glorious above;
O gratefully sing his power and His love:
our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour,
and girded with praise.

2) O tell of his might, O sing of His grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
his chariots of wrath
the deep thunder-clouds form,
and dark is his path
on the wings of the storm.

3) The earth, with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
established it fast by a changeless decree,
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

4) Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
it streams from the hills,
it descends to the plain,
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

5) Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;
your mercies how tender,
how firm to the end,
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!

6) O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
while angels delight, to hymn you above;
your ransomed creation,
though feeble our praise,
in true adoration our voices will raise.

Epistle Reading - Hebrews 5:1-10

Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' And he says in another place, 'You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.'

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel Reading - Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.' 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked. They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?' 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

StF 272 - From heaven you came

- 1) From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled;
not to be served, but to serve,
and give your life, that we might live.
This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.
- 2) There in the garden of tears,
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will, but yours,' he said.
This is our God, the Servant King ...

- 3) Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice;
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.
This is our God, the Servant King, ...
- 4) So let us learn how to serve,
and in our lives enthrone him;
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.
This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.

Sermon

I love the Book of Job, because Job is **not** an official believer.

This is a part of Jewish scripture, but Job is **not** a Jew. He lives in the land of Uz, wherever that is ... somewhere 'in the East' ... certainly nowhere that Jews are recorded as living in the Bible. And he lives before the Law given through Moses, or if it had been given, he has certainly never heard it, because he offers sacrifices himself, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And yet, when perplexed by the apparent injustice of God's dealings with him, this man, who has never received prophetic scripture, begins to sense where God's revelation is going, better than those who have.

In chapter **9** he sees that there needs to be a mediator between God and humanity:

'He is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him,
that we might confront each other in court.

If only there were someone to mediate between us,
someone to bring us together,
someone to remove God's rod from me,
so that his terror would frighten me no more.

Then I would speak up without fear of him,
but as it now stands with me, I cannot. *[v32-35]*

and in chapter **16** he comes to believe that there is such a one

Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high.
My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God;
on behalf of a man he pleads with God, as one pleads for a friend. *[v19-21]*

In chapter **14** he senses that there has to be a hope of new life beyond death

If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed!
If only you would set me a time and then remember me!
If someone dies, will they live again?

All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come.
You will call and I will answer you;
you will long for the creature your hands have made *[v13-15]*

and in chapter **19** he comes to believe that God will give such a new life:

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him, with my own eyes – I, and not another. *[v25-27].*

That should cause us to think about how we share our faith with folk outside the circle of those who already have some contact with a church. Just because they do not know the Bible as we do, or pray in the way that we do, that does not mean that God may not be already touching them by his Spirit, giving them a desire to meet Jesus. So, before we hammer them with our pre-prepared Gospel presentations, we need to listen to them, and learn where they already are with God.

Now let us see from our reading from **Hebrews 5** how Jesus Christ gives substance to Job's hopes.

We can see here how Jesus meets Job's desire for someone to **mediate** between God and Humanity. Let's start with v8: "[God's] Son though he was, [Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, ..."

I can imagine someone who likes to ask awkward questions saying, "If he was the Son of God, why did he need to learn obedience, to be made perfect? Surely, if he was God's Son, he would automatically have been obedient to him, and morally perfect?"

But anyone can say he is perfect, you can only tell if he really is, if his obedience is tested. Only because we know that Jesus remained perfectly obedient to God his Father, even through the agony of fear in Gethsemane, even though it meant he suffered crucifixion at the hands of evil men, do we know that he is able to offer his perfect life as a sacrifice for us, as Isaiah 53 predicted, a 'ransom for many', as Jesus says of himself in our Gospel reading (*Mark 10: 45*). Thus, he became "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him".

It is hard for us to obey, when it brings suffering on us, but Jesus understands what it is like; "he learned obedience from what he suffered", he has learned what human obedience to God in an evil world feels like.

He is repeatedly described in Hebrews as our 'high priest'. The priest's job was to be a mediator between God and Humanity, someone to bring God and Humanity together. When we offer our prayers to God the Father through Jesus, we know we are heard by one who perfectly knows and understands just what we are going through, and can offer his perfect, obedient human life to the Father in our place.

But *he* also perfectly meets *us* as God, so we know if Jesus welcomes us, as he does, God welcomes us.

Jesus also fulfils Job's desire for a **hope beyond death**, as we see in **verse 7**. "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and **he was heard** because of his reverent submission."

"But," I imagine someone asking, "was he heard? He asked his Father to spare him, if possible, having to drink that cup of suffering, but he still had to go through with it, and he was not saved from death - he died horribly, crying that God had forsaken him."

Yes, but was that the end? Both Jesus and those who heard him would have been aware that that cry of abandonment was how Psalm 22 starts, but that Psalm finishes on a note of triumph and hope. And even so, beyond his suffering and death, Jesus **was** raised in glory. God **did** save him from ... out of ... death.

That is not just wishful thinking; that is **fact**, there is **evidence** for it – evidence that has won sceptical non-believers to Christian faith [including me].

Ultimately, Jesus won. The oppressed overcame his oppressors. Life conquered death. God's love had the last word.

And if we obey Jesus' command to trust in him, God will raise us in glory also. That is the 'eternal salvation' of which Jesus is the source.

So, if ever someone asks you, or you wonder yourself, with Job,

where God has got to, in a world filled with so much injustice and suffering:

look to Jesus on his cross, and know that God is in the midst of it with you;

look to Jesus in his Resurrection, and know that one day you will be with God beyond it,
in a glory that will far outweigh all present suffering.

Amen.

StF 362 - Meekness and majesty

1) Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony, the man who is God.
Lord of eternity dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility and washes our feet.

O what a mystery,
meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship
for this is your God, this is your God.

2) Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence,
yet learns obedience to death on a cross:
suffering to give us life,
conquering through sacrifice,
and as they crucify prays, 'Father forgive.'

O what a mystery,
meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship
for this is your God, this is your God.

3) Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible,
love indestructible in frailty appears.
Lord of infinity, stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity
to the heights of his throne.

O what a mystery,
meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship
for this is your God, this is your God,
this is your God.

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Prayers of Intercession

The Bible teaches 'the priesthood of all believers' which means we are all called to be intercessors for this world, which God created and for which his Son, Jesus, died.

If you would share in my intercessions, whenever I say **Gracious Father**, please respond **Hear our prayer**; I will leave pauses at times, when you can add your own thoughts.

Heavenly Father, as members of your family, we pray for our brothers and sisters, starting with those whose names are in our book of requests ...

And now, in silence, we remember other names that are on our hearts.

Gracious Father, Hear our prayer

Your word urges us to pray for all those in authority, that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. As we think of the current violence tormenting the lands where your Son once walked, we pray for the leaders of nations, that they may strive to do whatever may reduce violence and protect civilians.

We also pray for our Christian brothers and sisters in those lands, that they may have the strength to stand for Jesus and his way of peace and reconciliation. Especially, we pray for those in Lebanon, who were already caring for so many refugees.

We also remember other ongoing conflicts, in Ukraine and especially the civil war in Sudan and other countries in Africa, that the rest of the world seems to have forgotten.

Gracious Father, Hear our prayer

As we think of the knife-angel currently in Sandwell, we remember that violence is also a problem in our land. We pray for wisdom for the police and emergency services. Although the death toll here may be kept lower than in many lands, the pain is as great for those who lose loved ones. May they know you close to them now, to comfort them, and may young people heed their consciences and remember warnings from youth clubs and schools.

Gracious Father, Hear our prayer

At this season when we especially think about Creation, we thank you for the work of climate scientists, and pray that our leaders may heed their warnings and take action, before it is too late.

We pray for scientists revealing the order of your creation, and so giving glory to you, even when they don't know they are.

We pray for all creators in music and the arts, whose labours give glory to you who created them, even when they don't know they are.

There are so many other things that your Spirit brings to our minds at this time, and we bring them before you now in the silence.

Gracious Father, Hear our prayer

Accept these prayers we pray, for we offer them in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray to you, saying:

**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 327 - Jesus is King (during which **Offering** is brought up)

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| 1) Jesus is King and I will extol him,
give him the glory and honour his name.
He reigns on high, enthroned in the heavens,
Word of the Father, exalted for us. | 3) We come to him, our Priest and Apostle,
clothed in his glory and bearing his name,
laying our lives with gladness before him;
filled with his Spirit we worship the King. |
| 2) We have a hope that is steadfast and certain,
gone through the curtain
and touching the throne.
We have a Priest who is there interceding,
pouring his grace on our lives day by day. | 4) 'O Holy One, our hearts do adore you;
thrilled with your goodness
we give you our praise!
Angels in light with worship surround him,
Jesus, our Saviour, for ever the same. |

Wendy Churchill

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Closing Prayer

All things come from you, O God, and we here offer back to your service a small part of all you have given us. Accept it, we pray, as a token that we offer ourselves, all that we have and are, in the service of your Son, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us.

Send us out, now, with the blessing of your Spirit, to be his Body in the world, showing his life of love, to speed the day when all creation shall acknowledge him as King. **Amen**

Jesus says, "Go and make disciples": and he will be with us, always! Amen