

23rd August 2026 – Morning Service

Andy Haynes

Call to Worship: Psalm 124:8

Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Our opening hymn to follow that is one of Charles Wesley's, and speaks of heaven and earth combining to praise in songs the divine Deity; so let's do just that as we sing.

StF 208 – Let heaven and earth combine

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| 1) Let earth and heaven combine,
angels and men agree,
to praise in songs divine the incarnate Deity,
our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man. | 4) He deigns in flesh to 'appear,
widest extremes to join;
to bring our vileness near, and make us all divine:
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below. |
| 2) He laid his glory by, he wrapped him in our clay;
unmarked by human eye,
the latent Godhead lay;
infant of days he here became,
and bore the mild Immanuel's name. | 5) Made perfect first in love, and sanctified by grace,
we shall from earth remove,
and see his glorious face:
then shall his love be fully showed,
and we shall all be lost in God. |
| 3) Unsearchable the love that has the Saviour brought;
the grace is far above both earth and angel's thought:
suffice for us that God, we know,
our God, is manifest below. | |

Charles Wesley

Prayer of Adoration

Dear Lord God, we thank you that we can come together as part of Your family this morning. We know that we join with countless others around the world that love and worship you. We thank you for this privilege. We thank you that all ages are called to gather together in your name to praise and worship you in this way. Help us as we come to count the many blessings you pour out upon us. We thank you for the world we live in, created by your mighty and powerful hand. So awesome are your ways, you are all knowing, all loving; Holy and true, almighty and full of splendour, and yet we can still call you Father God.

We bow before you this morning and give you honour and praise, help us as we do so to worship you in spirit and in truth. Give us contrite hearts and a desire to seek you more earnestly, walking closer with you, aiming to please you in all that we do and say.

We thank you for your goodness to us, and for your word and all its teaching. We thank you for the life and example of Jesus, and for His ministry, but we thank you most of all for His sacrifice, the sacrifice that covers all our sins and opens the floodgate that all may enter the life that you have prepared for all those that love and serve the Lord Jesus. **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

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.**

kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

StF 531 – What a friend we have in Jesus

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| 1) What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer! | 3) Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge -
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In his arms he'll take and shield you,
You will find a solace there. |
| 2) Have we trials and temptations,
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
Take it to the Lord in prayer. | |

Joseph Melicott Scriven

Reading: Matthew 16: 13-20 (NIV)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'

They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

StF 346 – Christ is the world's light

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| 1) Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;
Born in our darkness, he became our Brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high. | 3) Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other;
Sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother -
He, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father.
Glory to God on high. |
| 2) Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and
none other;
No one can serve him and despise another.
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high. | 4) Give God the glory, God and none other;
Give God the glory, Spirit, Son, and Father;
Give God the glory, God with us my brother:
Glory to God on high. |

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Sermon

In our reading this morning, Jesus seems to have found a quiet place for some time alone with His disciples. It doesn't say that crowds gathered round, nor does it indicate that He was being pressed by the throng. There is no mention of borrowing a boat to preach from or to get away from the throng. There were no crippled or diseased folk crying out for help. Just Jesus and His disciples.

In the version from Mark 8:27, it says they were on their way to the villages near Caesarea Philippi, so it seems they may have been strolling along together. That's the first lesson for me in today's gospel reading. Don't we all need a quiet time with Jesus?

Luke 5:16 says "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Mark 1:35, "Very early in the morning Jesus went off to a solitary place to pray."

There's a hymn by William Longstaff, which begins 'Take time to be holy – speak oft with the Lord, abide in Him always and feed on His word.' The 2nd verse says 'Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.' I wonder if we are finding a quiet time each day to pray and read the scripture? Are we spending some time with Jesus on a daily basis? If we do, it will prove to be a good investment of our time.

I think it was Spurgeon that said, "Don't speak to anyone in the morning, unless you've spoken to God first." How does the hymn go – 'Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy one is here.' And time with Jesus is precious time. We should desire to be in His presence. Time without distractions. Time to concentrate. Time to think. Time to talk.

We sang earlier 'What a friend we have in Jesus,' and who here has a friend that they don't bother to talk to? They wouldn't be a friend for long if we ignored them would they? So why is it that we are so slow to talk to Jesus? He wants us to speak to him, to bring our concerns and worries to him, and even to ask our questions of Him!

And talking of questions, what a question Jesus had for His disciples. "Who do people say that I am?" "Who do people say..." This isn't looking for the negativity of the religious leaders, but asking about the thoughts of the crowds in general. And the responses vary from the disciples (v14) from 'John the Baptist' to Elijah, or Jeremiah to 'one of the prophets'.

And these weren't derogatory answers – but not accurate ones either! Which just goes to show that it is possible for us to have complimentary thoughts towards Jesus, but not correct ones, not sufficient ones, not truthful ones. And unfortunately, sometimes that includes us too! But why did Jesus have to ask this question at all? Surely He already knew the answer? Jesus knows everything – we are told on numerous occasions that Jesus knew what people were thinking. It arises with His dealings with the Pharisees, the disciples, the crowds.

Well yes, He most certainly would have done, so it's obviously not for His benefit that He asks this question. Therefore, it must be for the benefit of the disciples.

What do I mean by that? Well, it makes them think! It introduces the subject. It prepares them for the following question. The question that did require an answer from them. For their benefit once again, and not for His.

This second question was a crucial one. Verse 15: "But what about you?" He asked – "Who do you say that I am?"

I believe it's a question He is asking of you and me this morning. What are we going to tell Him? Can we answer it? Have you ever played that game where someone sticks a piece of paper to your forehead with a name on it, and you have to guess who you are? Well here's Jesus playing a different variation of the game. He's got a sticker on His forehead with 'Son of Man' written on it, and they still have to guess who HE is!

Listen to the reading again in v13: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Jesus uses this description of himself, which indicates the human side of Jesus, it points to the servant hood of Christ. This is a phrase we find in the book of Ezekiel, and is not used with respect, but rather to humble Ezekiel.

Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58 both record Jesus saying “Foxes have their dens and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest His head.” So Jesus uses it to symbolise His human form in a humbling way. In other words, there is no hint of anything divine or spiritual in this title. They were given no clues as to the answer Jesus was seeking. To be fair though, these disciples should get it right, after all they had been with Jesus and had a better teaching than others, spent more time with Him than anyone else, heard more, seen more, witnessed it all first hand.

We find these words earlier in Matthew’s gospel, in chapter 10 verse 1: “Jesus called His twelve disciples together and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to cure every kind of disease and sickness.” So we see that these disciples had even been given power in His name! Surely you would have expected Jesus to ask them this question before trusting them with this sort of authority 6 chapters earlier!?! I’m encouraged by it though. Very encouraged indeed.

It appears that we are a work in progress when it comes to Jesus. It does mean that we don’t have to wait until we are perfect before we can know Jesus and His power. We don’t have to pass all the exams before we are let loose to tell others about Him. We can learn as we go – serve as an apprentice to Jesus. Would the disciples have ever had a chance if they had to get every question right before Jesus would trust them to do anything? Look at the mistakes they made? They were still getting it wrong right up to His death. Peter denied Him three times! They were getting it wrong after the resurrection as well! Thomas wouldn’t believe unless he put his finger into the nail prints! Well Hallelujah there’s hope for us this morning! You still getting it wrong? I know I am. But Jesus still loves you and me and wants us to know Him better!

Are you still confused? I know I can be. But Jesus still loves you and me and wants us to know Him better! You still coming here just for the coffee and chat? Jesus still loves you and wants you to know Him better!

So, what do we say to the question? Is Jesus precious to us? Is He the fairest of 10,000? Is it well with us, well with our souls? Peter’s answer is short, but it’s full, and true, and to the point. Matthew 16:16: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Here is Peter’s confession of the Christian faith. It was spoken to Christ, and because of that, it becomes an act of devotion. Jesus, Son of the Living God. The glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Have you told Christ so? “Thou art the Christ – Son of the living God” It’s a fact, it’s a statement, it’s a confession of belief, it’s an act of devotion and it pleases Jesus.

How do we know it pleases Jesus? Just listen to His response from Matthew 16:17! “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah,” Jesus said. Jesus referring to his original name of Simon, before Jesus re-named him Peter meaning ‘rock’. In other words, you human being, you ordinary fisherman. Good for you He says and then tells him it’s not him! Because verse 17 continues: “For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” And we all need this revelation by the spirit. What did Jesus tell the woman at the well in John chapter 4? “There will come a time when people will worship in spirit and in truth.”

Jesus is telling Simon Peter that he is human but now be aware of the spirit doing the work of my Father in you. This is not human intervention, it’s not your doing – it’s truth from God!

So why is it well done Peter if it came from God? (Why ‘Blessed are you, Simon?') Earlier in the chapter we read that the Pharisees and Sadducees were asking for a miracle. Why? Because they wanted proof of who He was. Matthew 12:38 says that they wanted to see a miraculous sign! (and again in Matthew 16:1!) Now if we wind things back a little we can see that they had been there when Jesus healed a man with a paralysed hand in the Synagogue. In Mark Chapter 3 and Luke Chapter 6, the religious leaders accused Him of breaking the laws of the Sabbath and made plans to kill Him. Matthew 12:24 tells us that when He drove out demons they accused Him of being possessed by Beelzebub.

In Matthew Chapter 9 (and Mark 2 and Luke 5), He healed a paralytic by forgiving him his sins and they witnessed this accusing Him of blasphemy. How much proof did they need? Are we the same this morning? Needing more proof? Their hearts were hardened. They were stubborn and proud.

What does the prophet Isaiah say in 6:9: “No matter how much you listen, you will not understand. No matter how much you look, you will not see.” Are we here today with a hardened heart, determined we’re not going to move forward in our faith? Or have we an open heart and mind ready to hear and receive the truth about Jesus Christ? Revelation 3:20 puts it perfectly: “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him, and he with me” Have we responded to His call? Will we begin our apprenticeship with Him? Can you answer Him this morning – “You are the Messiah, Son of the living God?”

After Jesus speaks these words to Peter, the next sentence is what we need to take heed of, from Matthew 16:18: “And I tell you, that you are Peter, (notice Jesus now refers to him by the name He gave to him) and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it!” The church we know today was started by these apostles 2000 years ago, and it’s still alive. It’s very much alive in parts of the world where Christians declare Christ as the Messiah. It’s very much alive when everything done is for the glory of Christ and for His kingdom. And we’d keep it alive here too, if we were willing to do the same. Not works for our own glory, not works in our own strength, but what the Christ would have us do – where and when and how. Everything in God’s will, to the glory of Jesus Christ.

How does Edward J Burns’ hymn go? “We have a gospel to proclaim, Good news for all throughout the earth. A gospel of a Saviour’s name, We sing His glory, Tell His worth.” But we will not be able to proclaim this good news if we don’t believe it! We can’t share a love with the community that doesn’t exist between us. This fellowship with Christ is the most important factor of the Church. And the church is not the building. It’s the people. We are the church; the building is just convenience to keep the sun and rain out! If we are the church, then we need to be a rock on which Christ can build His kingdom!

Jesus said to His disciples when they admired the beautiful work of the temple in Luke 21:5: “The time will come when not one stone will be left on another, everyone will be thrown down.” The building doesn’t matter in the great scheme of things – but the souls of men and women do! The very purpose of the church is not its finery, is not even its reverence, but rather its message of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour!

John writes in his first epistle to the churches in 1 John 1:3-4: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us... with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. We write this in order that our joy may be complete.” So can you answer Jesus this morning when He asks “Who do you say I am?” Because if you can answer Him as Peter did – He can build His church with you? Our joy will also be complete as we bring others to know the love and salvation of Jesus Christ our Lord. So let’s encourage one another to get to know Jesus in a real and personal way – and when we do – to tell others about Him too! **Amen.**

StF 342 – All hail the power

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| 1) All hail the power of Jesu's name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him, crown him, crown him,
Crown him Lord of all! | 4) Let every kindred, every tribe
On this terrestrial ball,
To him all majesty ascribe,
And crown him, crown him, crown him,
Crown him Lord of all. |
| 2) You seed of Israel's chosen race,
You ransomed of the fall,
Hail him who saves you by his grace,
And crown him, crown him, crown him,
Crown him Lord of all! | 5) O that with yonder sacred throng
We at his feet may fall,
Join in the everlasting song,
And crown him, crown him, crown him,
Crown him Lord of all! |

3) Hail him, the heir of David's line
Whom David Lord did call,
The God incarnate, Man divine,
And crown him, crown him, crown him,
Crown him Lord of all!

Edward Perronet

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Lord, we now ask for the influence of Your Spirit in our world today. A world that is full of man's greed and evil. A world of hatred, where people are desperately in need of love. A world that is unfair, where human rights are disregarded, when so many people live in despair without any hope for the future. A world that is in financial turmoil as governments and countries struggle to make ends meet, and as a result the poor get poorer still. Help those that are most vulnerable, and bring wisdom to the leaders as they make decisions that affect the lives of so many under their rule. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We especially bring before You this morning those in our world who are suffering, the hungry, the sick, the deprived. We think of the people of Ukraine as the war stretches on and on with no ease of Russian aggression. We also pray for peace in the Middle east, with all the conflicts in that region. We bring before You now, all those suffering from natural disasters around the globe, such as the recent earthquakes and fires. Be with them all in their plight. We continue to pray for Christian people around the world who are suffering because of their faith in You. We ask that You bring them courage and strength, and may they know the riches and blessings that come from a unity in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our own country and its leaders. We pray for right decisions, that the consequences of their judgments will not have detrimental effects. Give all those in positions of authority wisdom and understanding and lead them in their actions, that they may work for the good of us all as they go about their daily tasks, thinking especially about Andy Burnham, as we have yet another new Prime Minister at the helm. Steer and guide him in all he does. We pray now for all those involved in the local wild fires in Stourbridge, thinking especially of all the people affected who have lost their homes and all their possessions. We thank You for the firefighter that worked so hard to control the fire, for those who were injured in the cause, and for all who have offered help and support in the crisis. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our churches and our communities. We ask that we may live as You lead us to live, that we become loyal and true servants in this place. May we learn from the stories in the Bible, see the faith of others, and be inspired by the works and teaching of Jesus. So let us go where You would have us go, and be what You would have us be, may we serve others as You teach us to give of our time and effort to the Glory of God, that many will see and know Your love as we allow You to work in us and through us in Jesu's name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray now for all those connected with our own church, and in the wider circuit. We think of the changes taking place, asking that you bless Rachel Moss as she joins the team, asking that You bless each of us in the roles we play to make sure our churches function and continue to proclaim the good news of Christ Jesus. And now dear lord we ask that You bring healing to all who are struggling and weighed down by pain. Help the lonely and bereaved to find love and the compassion of Jesus, and help us all through God's grace, to have a deeper understanding of His love for us, thus being able to share it with those in need. With that in mind, we bring before You now all who are known to us or who are connected to the congregation and are in need of prayer this morning. Dear Lord, we know that You understand the circumstances of each, before we utter their names in prayer, and so we ask that they may all know Your comfort and presence as we pray for them each and every day.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer. Amen.**

StF 350 – I cannot tell

- 1) I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
Should set his love upon us, now or then,
Or why, as Shepherd, he should seek
the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
When Bethlem's manger was his only home,
And that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.
- 2) I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
As with his peace he graced this place of tears,
Or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
The crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.
- 3) I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
How he will claim his earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
And he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
And some glad day his sun shall shine
in splendour,
When he the Saviour, Saviour of the world,
is known.
- 4) I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
When at his bidding every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation
When every human heart with love is filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heav'n, and heav'n to earth,
will answer:
'At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!'

William Young Fullerton

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all,
now and evermore. **Amen.**