

3rd May 2026 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship: Psalm 67: 3-4

Let the peoples praise you, O God. May all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.

StF 11 – Holy, Holy, Holy

- 1) Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty.
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity.
- 2) Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns
around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.
- 3) Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness
hide thee,
Though the sinful human eye thy glory
may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee.
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.
- 4) Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name in earth
and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity

Reginald Heber

Prayers

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who have given us your Son to be our Saviour and have appointed us to be your Church, to offer worship to you. Through the sacrifice of Christ, you have redeemed us and made us your own. You have given us unity through the Holy Spirit. We bring our songs of praise and offer to you all our works. The whole of nature will give you praise in earth and sky and sea.

Amen.

Lord, you have brought us into fellowship with yourself, yet we fail in many ways, in thought, word and action, in the things that we do and in the things that we neglect. In your mercy forgive us, and in your grace grant us fresh assurance that we are always part of your family. We hear your words to us that say that our sins are forgiven, and nothing shall snatch us out of your hands. We belong to you forever. We give you thanks and praise. **Amen.**

StF 363 – My Jesus, my Saviour

- 1) My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord there is none like you.
All of my days I want to praise
the wonders of your mighty love.
My comfort, my shelter,
tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am,
never cease to worship you.
- Ch) Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing,
power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down
and the seas will roar
at the sound of your name.
I sing for joy at the work of your hands.
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
promise I have in you.*

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Reading: 1 Peter 2: 2-10 (NIV)

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

‘See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.’

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,’

and,

‘A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.’

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

StF 319 – Christ Triumphant

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| 1) Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
Hear us as we sing: | 3) Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,
Victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
Sinners justified: |
| <i>Ch) Yours the glory and the crown,
The high renown,
The eternal name!</i> | 4) Priestly king, enthroned for ever
High in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
Stifle hymns of love: |
| 2) Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
By Your humble birth: | 5) So, our hearts and voices raising
Through the ages long,
Ceaselessly upon You gazing,
This shall be our song: |

Michael Saward © Michael Saward

Reading: John 14: 1-14 (NIV)

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.’

Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’

Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.'

Sermon

What is the Church? What is the first thing that you think of when someone mentions that word? Is it a building with a steeple? Perhaps it's a group of people standing up and singing traditional hymns? I remember learning in school religious education lessons what a church apparently looks like. The illustration was of a traditional Anglican church on an East-West orientation, in the form of a cross, with very specific areas with their own technical names, some of which I had never heard of. The church I attended at the time and indeed ones I have been part of since, were very different from that.

So, if a place of worship does not look like that stereotypical R.E. lesson building is it still a church? Is the Church a building at all?

According to the Bible, the Church is not a building but a community. The passage from 1 Peter does not even use the word that we translate as church (Greek *ekklesia*, which means the called-out assembly), but speaks of a priesthood and a people, of which we are made partakers through Christ.

The passage from John's gospel reminds us of who is at the centre of this new community. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the only means by which people can know God as loving Father. It is only through Jesus that we can be assured that we have an everlasting place prepared for us in God's family.

This goes against the general opinion in society, which is often that anything goes and truth is relative, and that there are many ways to salvation. Some would say that all religions are just different paths to God. Sure, we have much that we can learn from studying other religions, and there are good things in them, but the Bible teaches that there is only one way to God. Some religions don't even have a god at their centre, but are philosophies of life.

We speak today using the term Christianity to describe our faith, yet originally a different term was used: "The Way". This means that to know God is actually not a philosophy or a set of teachings (although these can be part of our life) but a specific person, Jesus our Lord.

One of Jesus' most famous disciples was a man called Simon, who Jesus renamed Peter. The name Peter comes from the Greek for rock or stone. We use words in English related to this Greek root, such as our word petrology, which is a branch of geology looking at the origin and distribution of rocks. Peter is an interesting character that many people identify with: enthusiastic and perhaps over-confident but who let Jesus down when challenged by a servant by denying that he knew him. Yet this is the same man who Jesus called the Rock. Peter went on to become a reliable preacher of the gospel and the main leader of the early church. I wonder, when we are feeling weak or looking at our past failures, how does Jesus see us? Perhaps if we could just hear the voice of Jesus it would be one of encouragement and calling to

greater service than we have previously known! Jesus can see in us the strengths that we cannot see in ourselves. We are restored from past failures and given a new commission. If you are that person dwelling on the past with regret, let the truth that you have just heard set you free!

Perhaps it's not surprising, given his rocky name, that Peter speaks in this passage about stones and rocks. He refers to Jesus as the Living Stone, the Cornerstone and the Rock. Peter describes believers in Jesus, the readers of Peter's letter, as being like living stones, built up into a spiritual house.

Jesus is the Cornerstone of the new community, God's united Church of Jewish and Gentile believers. Without Jesus we have no salvation and no church. If the Church is a building then the term is used figuratively, in that Christ is our Living Stone, and we are all built up, like living stones, to make a new Temple, a house of God, not made with bricks or stones or wood or concrete or steel, but with people. This is the difference between the Church and other organisations. It is a living organism, built with people around one Saviour. Just as a cornerstone gives a building its orientation, Jesus gives the church its position. Without Jesus the church just becomes another social club, or a political organisation, or an educational institution, or just a talking shop. There is nothing wrong with any of those things but we are much more than that.

There is one Church with many expressions. It may look different in one part of the world compared with another. There will be differences in language and appearance and liturgy and music, but one Church.

A recent experience illustrates my own recognition of this. Last Sunday I had the privilege of attending a service involving the baptism by immersion of two people that I know through the Cradley Heath Community Link. The Fellowship in which it took place in Handsworth, although it had Wesleyan in its title, did not feel in its style of worship much like a Methodist church. The music was very loud and I did not know most of the songs, although they were sung by the congregation and the visiting Town Hall Gospel Choir from Birmingham with great exuberance. The ethnic background of most of the congregation members was very different from anything that we currently have in the Vale of Stour. Yet even with all these differences from what I'm used to I felt very much at home there. The substance of the statement of faith repeated by the baptism candidates was familiar to me and something that I can say Amen to. The Jesus worshipped in this church is the same Lord that I worship here in the Vale of Stour. There was a great sense of love and welcome. I reflected on the fact that we are all one family in Christ. It is not a different church but we are all expressions of the one Church of which Christ is the Head and Cornerstone and in which we are like living stones built up into a new Temple. All of the baptism candidates were being received into the same family into which I had been baptised many years before. Wherever in the world people worship God the Holy Trinity, no matter in what language that worship is conducted, we are members of the same Church, a holy nation, called out from the world to offer worship acceptable to the Lord, to declare the praises of him who has saved us.

Christ is our Rock and foundation. He is the one on whom we can rely. He will not shift along with the philosophies of the world. His word is the solid ground on which we stand. Jesus is the one who was rejected by people but chosen by God and precious to God. He is the one to whom we come today. He takes our flawed humanity and transforms us into a spiritual house. Without Jesus we have no purpose but with him we become like living stones, useful and strong and reliable, built up into something that is far greater than the sum of its parts. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

StF 692 – Your hand, O God, has guided

- 1) Your hand, O God has guided
your flock, from age to age;
the wondrous tale is written,
full clear, on every page;
our forebears owned your goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.
- 2) Your heralds brought glad tidings
to greatest, as to least;
they summoned all to hasten
and share the great King's feast;
their gospel of redemption,
sin pardoned, right restored,
was all in this enfolded:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.
- 3) Your mercy will not fail us
nor leave Your work undone;
with your right hand to help us,
the victory shall be won;
and then, by all creation,
your name shall be adored,
and this shall be their anthem:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Edward Hayes Plumtre

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord God, we thank you that you have made us a Covenant people through the sacrifice of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him you reconciled us to yourself and to each other. We rejoice that we are citizens of your Kingdom forever and partakers of the Divine glory. **Amen.**

You call us to intercede for your world and to look towards the reconciliation with yourself of all things. We therefore pray for all the people of the world, that your Kingdom be established in them.

Where there is war, let there be forgiveness and reconciliation. We pray for Iran, the Arab countries and Israel, for a genuine, deep and lasting peace and justice. We pray for a conclusion to war between Russia and Ukraine. We remember all areas of conflict in the world and pray that peace may reign.

Where people are alienated from you, let the truth of the gospel bring them into fellowship. We pray for the messengers of peace, the evangelists who bring the life-changing message of Jesus. May their feet be swift and their voices heard, so that many respond and join your universal Church. We pray for ourselves, that in our homes and streets and towns and workplaces we may embody the gospel of Christ in our deeds and words. We pray for ourselves as your Church here in the West Midlands, that our congregations may show and tell the gospel, that individuals and communities and regions may be transformed. Guide our congregations and Circuit as we move forward in your way. Unite us in word and action with other expressions of your Universal Family in our region.

Where people suffer we pray for your comfort and provision. Where there is disease let there be your healing and peace. We pray especially for those known to us who need your healing touch.

Where there is lack, let there be abundance. Where people mourn, let there be comfort. Make us messengers of your peace.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **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 677 – Christ is made the sure foundation

- 1) Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and cornerstone,
chosen of the Lord and precious,
binding all the church in one;
holy Zion's help forever,
and her confidence alone.
- 2) To this temple, where we call thee,
come, O Lord of hosts, today:
with thy wonted loving-kindness
hear thy people as they pray;
and thy fullest benediction
shed within its walls always.
- 3) Here vouchsafe to all thy servants
what they ask of thee to gain,
what they gain from thee forever
with the blessed to retain,
and hereafter in thy glory
evermore with thee to reign.
- 4) Praise and honour to the Father,
Praise and honour to the Son,
Praise and honour to the Spirit,
ever Three and ever One,
One in might, and One in glory,
while unending ages run.

John Mason Neale

Blessing

Lord God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the Head and Cornerstone of the Church, may we, your Royal Priesthood, offer acceptable worship to you and proclaim your glory to the world. **Amen.**

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us now and for evermore. **Amen.**