

3rd October 2021 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship - Psalm 8:1

Lord our sovereign, how glorious is your name throughout the world!
Your majesty is praised as high as the heavens.

StF 331 – King of kings

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| 1) King of Kings, majesty.
God of heaven living in me,
Gentle Saviour, closest friend,
Strong deliverer, beginning and end,
All within me falls at Your throne. | 2) Earth and heaven worship You,
Love eternal, faithful and true,
Who bought the nations, ransomed souls,
Brought this sinner near to Your throne;
All within me cries out in praise. |
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*Ch) Your majesty, I can but bow.
I lay my all before You now.
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your majesty.*

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God our Heavenly Father, you have made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. You have created human beings and invested them with glory and honour. You provide so much for us. In your Son you provide for our salvation. Through faith in him we are redeemed and given the assurance of life for evermore. You provide in nature the materials that satisfy all of our physical needs. Your Spirit dwells within us, gives us power for living and leads us into all the truth. He illuminates the word as we study the scriptures that you have generously given for our health and instruction. In every way you take care of our needs. All of this comes from your love and goodness. We give you our thanks and praise. Yet we do not only praise you for all your provision for us but we worship you for who you are. Your own glory is reflected in all that you have made, though we see it only dimly. How much greater is the radiance of your being. Your goodness is beyond our measure. Your generosity and grace are all around us. Your love is so much greater than anything we can encounter even in the best of human relationships. You are the perfect Father and Saviour and Friend. We worship and adore you. **Amen.**

When we neglect the words of Scripture that feed and strengthen us

L: Lord, have mercy. **R: Christ, have mercy.**

When we fail to appreciate the grace that saves us and we trust in our own good deeds:

L: Lord, have mercy. **R: Christ, have mercy.**

When we are unappreciative of the blessings that surround us and pursue us:

L: Lord, have mercy. **R: Christ, have mercy.**

When we fail to share with others the treasures that you have given us:

L: Lord, have mercy. **R: Christ, have mercy.**

Hear the words of grace: Our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Reading: Mark 10:1-16

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" "What did Moses command you?" he replied. They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

StF 255 – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

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| 1) The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow. | 3) The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ
to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss. |
| 2) The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet
to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair. | 4) God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all! |

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Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honour and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”

Sermon

People often accuse the Bible of being full of patriarchal and oppressive rules. I suspect that many people who hold that view have never read the Bible in its entirety, and others have not understood the context and culture in which it was set. If we really look at the background of many of the scriptures, we find a concern for human beings and their dignity and protection that was revolutionary for its time.

In the gospel passage we read about marriage and divorce, then about Jesus' welcome for children. It seems that both of these subjects have in common the value of human beings, especially those who were considered less important than others. The view of marriage expressed in this passage gives protection to women in a society in which a marriage could be dissolved easily by the male of the species. In this society, children were often marginalised and could be ignored, yet Jesus shows that they are to be cherished and welcomed.

In this and way and in so many other ways in the gospels, Jesus shows that all people have value, emphasising those whom society has left behind. Many come to him and receive healing: the sick, the blind, the deaf, the lame the oppressed. A poor widow is commended for giving all that she has in contrast to the rich who give larger sums of money but can easily afford it. Lepers, who were outcasts, come to Jesus and are cleansed and restored to society. If you ever feel unimportant or undervalued, or that your rights are being ignored, then this message is for you. God values you. He knows who you are. He appreciates what you do. You are as important in his sight as anyone else.

Hebrews chapter 2 quotes from Psalm 8. This is one of my favourite psalms as it depicts the writer looking into a starry sky and wondering at the fact that the Creator places value on people. In such a vast universe, why would the Lord take any notice of the tiny speck of dust that is our planet and the people who live on it? However, he does, and he loves us and invests us with glory and honour.

The word used in the scriptures translated "crowned" comes from a Hebrew root *atar*. This has various meanings but one that is important here is that it can depict being surrounded as if in protection. It can also be used in a context that shows adornment as though with a diadem. I like the idea that God surrounds his people with glory and honour, and that he adorns them. The word translated "glory" is the Hebrew word *kavod*, which contains ideas of weight and heaviness. Human beings are never lightweight and unimportant. If you have an idea of who God has made you to be then you can know that you are important and that you have positive influence. That doesn't mean that we can use our status to lord it over others or dominate them. Indeed, anyone who is truly a follower of Christ and actuated by the Holy Spirit will not want to do so. However, it does mean that if someone disrespects or demeans or ignores us then this does not in any way reflect the truth of who we are. God sees us as important, beautiful and precious. Indeed, others may notice an air of humility and dignity about us and be challenged by it. We refuse to be controlled by others, yet continue to love them. We refuse to let others determine our sense of worth, yet challenge them about their own self-image and the way that they view others. We receive from God strength and honour, which no one can take away.

The idea of being surrounded reminds me of Psalm 23 verse 6 where we learn that "goodness and grace will follow me all the days of my life". In other words, when we are members of God's family, these blessings pursue us. We can't get away from them, not that we would wish to. Perhaps the full glory of the passage from Hebrews is seen when we understand how we come to be members of God's family. It is not by our human birth. It is not by our own efforts. It is through what Christ has done. God has spoken through his Son, who is heir of all things, and through whom the universe was created. The glory of the Father is in the Son, who is in status far above the angels, yet it was the Son who freely gave himself up to die for us so that we might become members of his family. He broke the power of death and sin and now reigns in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Through him, we, receiving the free gift of salvation, can live with him for ever. This is the glory of the Father, the supremacy of Christ above all created things, and the dignity of humans. Thanks be to God. Amen.

StF 696 – For the healing of the nations

- 1) For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
Help us rise and pledge our word.
- 2) Lead us forward into freedom;
From despair your world release
That, redeemed from war and hatred,
All may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
Fear will die and hope increase.
- 3) All that kills abundant living,
Let it from the earth be banned;
Pride of status, race, or schooling,
Dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
May we hallow life's brief span.
- 4) You, Creator-God, have written
Your great name on humankind;
For our growing in your likeness
Bring the life of Christ to mind;
That by our response and service
Earth its destiny may find.

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Prayers of Intercession

Lord our God, we pray for our world. You have placed us here to be a blessing and a means of bringing in your kingdom and healing. We pray for our planet and the natural world, and in particular for the forthcoming COP26 climate summit. Give the leaders of nations the political will to make bold and courageous decisions towards the good stewardship of nature. We pray also for nations in turmoil or conflict, places still affected by high levels of covid, and people suffering hardship because of war or ecological degradation.

L: In your grace and mercy **R: redeem and heal this world.**

We pray for our nation, for wisdom for our politicians and government departments regarding the continued opening up of businesses and society in a safe way, and the tackling of supply problems and shortages of personnel in certain professions. We pray for the continued rollout of the vaccine, especially among younger people and groups where the take-up has been slow.

L: In your grace and mercy **R: redeem and heal this world.**

We pray for our circuit and churches, our ministers, helpers, members and adherents. We offer up to you those known to us within and outside of our fellowships, who have particular needs, people who need physical or mental healing, people who are grieving, those who are facing situations where they need wisdom and guidance, and people who need a fresh revelation of the peace of God that passes understanding. Be with those in hospitals and care homes, and the carers who look after them. Give strength to family members who visit, or who care for people that they live with.

L: In your grace and mercy **R: redeem and heal this world.**

We pray for our society. As your Church, your family, may we grasp more fully the knowledge of the reign of God, that we may share this good news with those around us. May we be so rooted in our understanding of the grace and love of God that we want to share the gospel in deed and word wherever we go. As we do so, we ask you, Lord, to transform our society and culture: replace falsehood with truth, offence with love, hardness of heart with forgiveness, the mind-set of death with that of life and peace.

L: In your grace and mercy **R: redeem and heal this world.**

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 526 – Lord of all hopefulness

- 1) Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever childlike, no cares
could destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break
of the day.
- 2) Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane
and the lathe,
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon
of the day.

- 3) Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms
to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve
of the day.
- 4) Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence
is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end
of the day.

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Closing prayer & Blessing

We thank you, Lord, that you have given us your Son to be our Saviour, and that through him we are part of your family. May the knowledge of your great love for us pervade our being through the Holy Spirit who enables us to call out "Abba, Father." **Amen.**

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us now and forevermore. **Amen.**