

WINCHESTER, EASTLEIGH & ROMSEY CIRCUIT

Service at Home - Sunday 27 August 2023

prepared by Rev John Archer

Introductory Prayer

Let our souls rejoice in your power, O God, and our hearts in your love. As our mouths are filled with your praise, may our lives testify to your grace. Susan Crosby-Methodist Preacher(1729-1804)

Let us read, pray or sing StF 748 (Glorious things of thee are spoken) [Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken \(Tune: Abbot's Leigh - 4vv\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

1 Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
he whose word cannot be broken
formed thee for his own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded,
what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

2 See! The streams of living waters,
springing from eternal love,
well supply thy sons and daughters,
and all fear of want remove;
who can faint, while such a river
ever flows their thirst to assuage --
grace which, like the Lord, the giver,
never fails from age to age?

3 Saviour, if of Zion's city
I, through grace, a member am,
let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in thy name.
Fading are our worldly pleasures,
all their boasted pomp and show;
solid joys and lasting treasures
none but Zion's children know.
John Newton (1725-1807)

Prayers

Sovereign God

We have come to worship you
to declare your faithfulness
to acknowledge your majesty
and to marvel at your love

We are here to rejoice
to bring our thanks
to express our wonder
and to celebrate your goodness

We are here to seek mercy
to confess our mistakes
to recognise our weaknesses
and to ask for your pardon

We are here to pray
for ourselves,

our world

and one another

We come to receive
hungry to hear you
thirsty to know you better
longing to be filled

Sovereign God

accept this time of worship
and help us, through it, to draw nearer to you.

Open our hearts to the love of Christ
our lives to the movement of your Spirit
our minds to all that you are and continue to do,
and so may we worship you
not just in these few moments we have set aside,
but in every moment of our lives –
to the glory of your name.

Lord of heaven and earth receive our praise
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

We pray 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.

We read, pray or sing StF 621 (When memory fades) ["When Memory Fades" by Jayne Southwick Cool, arr. by Eric Nelson - YouTube](#)

When memory fades and recognition falters,
When eyes we love grow dim, And minds confused,
Speak to our souls of love that never alters;
Speak to our hearts by pain and fear abused.
O God of life and healing peace,
Empower us with patient courage, by your grace
infused.

As the frailness grows, and youthful strengths
diminish,
In weary arms, which worked their earnest fill.
Your aging servants labour now to finish....
Their earthly tasks as fits your mystery's will.
We grieve their waning, yet rejoice, believing,
Your arms, unwearied, shall uphold us still.

Within your spirit, goodness lives unfading.
The past and future mingle into one.
All joys remain, un-shadowed light pervading.

No valued deed will ever be undone.
Your mind enfolds all finite acts and offerings.
Held in your heart, our deathless life is won.

Mary Louise Bingle (b.1953)

Bible Readings

Exodus 1 : 8 – 2:10 and Matthew 16 : 13 – 20

Prayers of Confession

Spirit of truth,
we confess that we have been shown your truth
but have not lived by it
Spirit of wisdom,
we confess our foolishness
and our inflated estimate of our own abilities
Spirit of discernment,
we confess that we have been quick to judge
and eager to cast the first stone.
Spirit of prophecy,
we confess that we often ignore the cutting edge of
your call. We prefer what is comfortable and familiar to
the disturbing challenge which you offer us.
Spirit of patience,
we confess our lack of patience,
our irritability and our failure to control our tempers
Spirit of peace,
we confess our part in the hatred
which divides nation from nation & person from person
Spirit of healing,
we confess our need of the wholeness which only you
can give
Spirit of life,
enable us to grasp fully and freely
the eternal life you give to those who ask
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us read, pray or sing St F 412 (See how great a flame) [SEE HOW GREAT A FLAME ASPIRES hymn words lyrics text sing along song Worship video - YouTube](#)

- 1 See how great a flame aspires,
kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesu's love the nations fires,
sets the kingdoms on a blaze.
To bring fire on earth he came;
kindled in some hearts it is:
O that all might catch the flame,
all partake the glorious bliss!
- 2 When he first the work begun,
small and feeble was his day:
now the word does swiftly run,
now it wins its widening way;
more and more it spreads and grows
ever mighty to prevail;
sin's strongholds it now o'erthrows,
shakes the trembling gates of hell.

- 3 Heirs of God, your Saviour praise!
He the door has opened wide;
he has given the word of grace,
Jesu's word is glorified;
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
he alone the work has wrought;
worthy is the work of him,
him who spoke a world from nought.

- 4 Saw you not the cloud arise,
little as a human hand?
Now it spreads along the skies,
hangs o'er all the thirsty land:
lo, the promise of a shower
drops already from above;
but the Lord will shortly pour
all the Spirit of his love!
Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Sermon

The Tibetan Buddhists believe in the transmigration of souls. When someone dies they suppose that the soul of that person goes immediately into a different body, the body of a child born at that instant.

This belief becomes vitally important when their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama dies. A search is made for a boy born at the moment when the great leader dies, and that boy is taken away and brought up as the new leader. Everybody including the new leader himself, knows that he is the new Dalai Lama. It sounds very strange to modern, western ears, although there are echoes of it in our hereditary monarchy. However even hereditary monarchs can abdicate and choose not to take on the title. But the Dalai Lama has no choice and there is no question about who he is.

In Judaism it was very different. Many Jews in Jesus' day believed (and many Jews today still believe) that God would send an anointed king, who would be the spearhead of the movement that would free Israel from oppression and bring justice and peace to the world at last. Nobody knew when or where this new king would be born, though many believed he would be a true descendant of King David. God had made wonderful promises about his future family. Micah predicts he would be born in Bethlehem.

What would the Messiah be like? How would people tell he had arrived? Nobody knew exactly and there were many theories. Many saw him as a warrior king who would defeat the pagan hordes and establish Israel's freedom. In the first century there were several would-be Messiahs who came and went attracting followers, who were quickly dispersed when their leader was caught by the authorities. One thing was certain. To be known as a would-be Messiah was to

attract attention from the authorities and almost certainly hostility.

So when Jesus wanted to put the question to his disciples, he took them well away from their normal sphere of activity. Caesarea Philippi is in the far north of the land of Israel, a good two days walk from the Sea of Galilee. It was outside the domain of Herod Antipas who was the ruler of Galilee. The population was mainly non-Jewish, and there Jesus would have peace to teach the twelve.

Confronting Jesus at this time was one clear and demanding problem. His time was short and he knew that his days were numbered. The problem was – was there anyone who understood him? Was there anyone who had recognised him for who and what he was? Were there any who, when he was gone from the flesh, would carry on his work and labour for his kingdom. To put it bluntly, it involved the very survival of the Christian faith. If there were none who had grasped the truth, or even glimpsed it, then all his work was undone. So Jesus was determined to put all to the test and to ask his followers who they believed him to be.

It is of interest to see where Jesus chose to ask this question. There could have been few areas with more diverse religious associations than Caesarea Philippi.

The area was scattered with the temples of the ancient Syrian Baal worship.

Not only the Syrian Gods had their worship here. In a cavern close by was the 'birthplace' of the great god Pan – the god of nature. The gods of Greece gathered around Caesarea Philippi.

Most significant of all there was the great temple of white marble built to the god - head of Caesar. It had been built by Herod the Great.

Here then is indeed a dramatic picture. Here is a homeless, penniless Galilean carpenter, with twelve very ordinary men around him. At the moment the orthodox Jews of his day are actually plotting and planning to eliminate and to destroy him as a dangerous heretic. He stands in an area littered with the temples of Syrian gods; in a place where the ancient Greek gods looked down; in a place where the history of Israel crowded in upon the minds of men; where the white marble splendour of the home of Caesar worship dominated the landscape. And there of all places this amazing carpenter stands and asks men who they believe him to be and expects the answer 'The Son Of God'. It is as if Jesus deliberately set himself against the background of the world's religions in all their history and demanded to be compared with them, and to have the verdict given in his favour!!

So then at Caesarea Philippi Jesus was determined to demand a verdict from his disciples. He must know before he sets out for Jerusalem and for the Cross, if anyone has grasped what and who he is. He did not ask the question directly – he led up to it. He began by asking what people were saying about him and who they took him to be.

Some said he was John the Baptist

Some said he was Elijah

Some said he was Jeremiah

So then when Jesus heard the verdicts of the crowd, he asks the all important question **“And you – who do you say that I am?”**

At that moment there may have been a moment's silence, whilst into the minds of the disciples there came thoughts that they were almost afraid to express in words; and then Peter makes his great discovery and his great confession; and Jesus knows that his work is safe because there is at least someone who understands.

“Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God”

Jesus knew now that there was at least someone who recognised him for the Messiah. 'Messiah' and 'Christ' are the same word (Hebrew and Greek)

Within this passage there are two great truths:

Essentially Peter's discovery was that even the highest of human categories are inadequate to describe Jesus Christ. When the people described Jesus as Elijah or Jeremiah, they thought that they were setting Jesus in the highest category that they could find. Elijah was the forerunner that men expected, and Jeremiah was the destined helper of God's people in time of trouble.

Doubtless Peter could not have given a theological account or philosophic expression of what he meant when he said that Jesus was the Son of the Living God. The one thing of which Peter was quite certain was that no merely human expression was adequate to describe Jesus.

This passage teaches us that our discovery of Jesus Christ must be a personal discovery. Jesus question is; **“You – what do you think of me?”** When Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews, Jesus' answer was “Does this question come from you, or have others told you about me?” Our knowledge of Jesus must never be second hand. A man might know every verdict that has ever been passed on Jesus, he might be able to give a competent summary of the teaching about Jesus of every great thinker and theologian – and still not be a Christian. **Christianity never consists of knowing about Jesus, it always consists in knowing Jesus. Jesus Christ demands a personal verdict.**

Jesus said to Peter “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven”. What does this mean? He is not telling Peter he will be the first pope and have authority to forgive sin. In Jesus' day the keys of the house were entrusted to the slave who was the “steward” of the owner. Keys are used to lock and unlock doors. Each time Christians take and proclaim the word of God (our faith) they are unlocking the gates of heaven for someone. But if they fail to share it they are keeping these doors locked to someone who may need entrance. Jesus is saying that the preaching of the Cross is the way to introduce others to salvation in Christ. It is a glorious privilege and an awesome responsibility to have “keys to the kingdom of heaven”. If people go away from us because of our silence, it will not be the fault of the gospel or the Christ whom it preaches but of his church. We will have played truant to the task God has placed upon us.

As believers we are members of his church, his body and we are founded on the Rock -Jesus Christ. We are charged with the keys that will unlock the doors of heaven – and that is the gospel of redemption.

What are we doing about it?

Let us read pray or sing StF 434 (Rock of ages) [Rock of Ages \(Grace Community Church\) - YouTube](#)

1 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy riven side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure,
cleanse me from its guilt and power.

2 Not the labours of my hands
can fulfil thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears for ever flow,
all for sin could not atone:
thou must save, and thou alone.

3 Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to thy cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Saviour, or I die.

4 While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar through tracts unknown,
see thee on thy judgement throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.

Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778)

Offertory Blessing

Lord bless what we have given. May it go where we cannot go and do what we cannot do.

In the name of Jesus. Amen

Intercessory prayers

Spend a moment or two praying for special concerns you have, and people you know who are in need of prayer support.

We pray for those who are anxious about the future, students making key decisions after their results.

Lord bring your comfort and love

We pray for those who are ill or unhappy and those who face physical mental or emotional difficulties.

Lord bring your healing and wholeness

We pray for those who have grown complacent, and those whose faith needs refreshment

Lord bring your challenge and excitement.

Amen

Let us read, pray or sing StF 167

(Colours of day) [COLOURS OF DAY - YouTube](#)

1 Colours of day dawn into the mind,
the sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
and let's give the message to the people we meet.

So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.

Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.

2 Go through the park, on into the town;
the sun still shines on; it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
the people of darkness are needing a friend.

3 Open your eyes, look into the sky,
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.

Sue McClellan (b. 1951), John Paculabo (b. 1946)
and Keith Ryecroft (b. 1949)

Blessing

May the memory of God's love enfold you,

May the assurance of Christ's presence empower you

May the joy of the Holy Spirit enable you to glimpse heaven here and at the last. Amen

Acknowledgements

Commentaries on Matthew by Wright and Barclay

Amended prayer from "Prayers for All Seasons" by Fawcett