

Morning Service for Beckminster via Zoom Sunday, 23 August 2020

Who is this Jesus?

Call to worship

Lord our God, dwelling in unapproachable light, source of all wisdom, goodness and truth; out of the abundance of our reason we adore you and out of the love of our hearts we praise you. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, One God for ever and ever. Amen *Susanna Wesley*

Opening prayer

Lord God, you speak to us in so many ways if we but stop and listen. We hear your words in our worship and in the increasing bustle of our everyday lives, and in the silences that this lockdown has brought to us. Help us not to crowd you out by our obsession with social media and entertainment programmes, for we know that you speak to us in the ordinary and the extraordinary, in the expected and unexpected and always in love. Help us to listen for you, so that we may respond to your call wherever and whenever it comes.

Let us hear you now.

Amen

(based on) Catherine James, local preacher, Derby circuit

STF 552

Here am I, Lord
I've come to do your will;
Here I am Lord
In your presence still.

Northumbria community from daily Celtic prayer

Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving

Generous God, we come to worship each with our own gifts to offer to you and to one another. Hear our songs and words of praise.

We come to worship each with our own concerns to offer to you and to share with one another. Hear our silence.

We come to worship each with our own faith to offer to you and to strengthen one another. Hear our passion and our prayerfulness.

We praise you O God, source of all being, eternal word and Holy Spirit. In wisdom you have brought forth the vibrancy of creation, the beginnings of new opportunities, the awareness of your love that we see in others, and in the awareness of your presence in the ordinariness of the everyday—making it extraordinary.

We thank you for the gifts that you have given us in home and friends and family. We thank you for this church as we continue to care and meet on line.

We thank you for the food on our table and the provision of care when we need it. Make us hungry for your spiritual food that we may be filled with love and peace and hope seeking always for that better. Amen

Reading from the Epistle of Paul to the Church in Rome 12: 1 - 8

1. I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
2. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
3. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you, not to think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
4. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function.
5. So we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.
6. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us; prophecy, in proportion to faith;
7. Ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;
8. the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.
NRSV

StF 664

**Lord you call us to your service
Each in our own way
Some to caring, loving healing
Some to preach or pray.
Some to work with quiet learning
Truth discerning
Day by day.**

**Lord, we set our human limits
On the work we do.
Send us your directing Spirit,
Pour your power through,
That we may be free in living
And in giving
All for you**

Marjorie Dobson 1940---

Gospel reading Matthew 16: 13-20

13. Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' 14. And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets' 15. He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' 16. Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of living God.' 17. And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. 18. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. And the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' 20. Then he sternly ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. NRSV

STF 356

**Jesus shall take the highest honour,
Jesus shall take the highest praise
Let all earth join heaven in exalting
The name that is above all other names.
Let's bow the knee in humble adoration,
For at his name every knee must bow.
Let every tongue confess he is Christ, God's only son,
Sovereign Lord we give you glory now.**

*For all honour and blessing and power
Belongs to you, belongs to you.
For all honour and blessing and power
Belongs to you, belongs to you.
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God*

Christopher Alan Bowater 1947-

Reflection

The church faces real challenges as it seeks to sustain its life and work in this generation. It is said that more have shown an interest in Faith matters since churches have been closed but will that translate in to more church attendees? I suspect not; but does that matter?

But if the question that Jesus posed to disciples is asked of us, what would we say? Jesus asks 'Who am I? What do I mean to you?' Believing in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour does it make a difference to the way you worship and live? This is a question we need to answer,

for if we answer without conviction we as the body of so called believers will fail in our influence to create God's kingdom here on earth.

So, are we in a position to defend our faith?

---Who is this Jesus who we are worshipping today?

Many Jews of Jesus day (and still today) believe that God would send them an anointed King who would spearhead a movement that would free Israel from oppression and bring justice and peace to their world. No-one knew when this King would be born although the prophet Micah indicated he would be born in Bethlehem. Many saw this Messiah as a warrior King who would defeat the pagan hordes and establish Israel's freedom and bring God's kingdom here on earth. No-one knew what this might look like. There were several in the first century who claimed to be the Messiah, but they were often caught by the authorities and their followers disbanded. To be known as a Messiah courted trouble.

When Jesus put the question to his disciples—'Who do men say that I am?'-- he chose Caesarea Philippi in the northern part of Israel. Caesarea Philippi was a cosmopolitan city rebuilt by Herod's son Philip, tetrarch of this region at this time and it contained a shrine to the Greek god Pan. The region was settled by Hellenised Syrian Gentiles and there were many ideas about religions and rulers.

It was here away from the mainstream Jewish people, well away from his usual sphere of activity that Jesus asked his question. The disciples reported the general reaction to Jesus—John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Not a cosy comforting fellow, but like the wild prophets of recent or ancient times, who stood up and spoke God's word fearlessly, a mouth piece against wickedness and injustice in high places. But within that prophetic ministry lay another dimension and Jesus wanted to know if his disciples had grasped that dimension. He was not just God's mouth piece, he was God's Messiah. So he asked them 'Who do **you** say that I am?' and clearly Simon Peter at least had grasped the facts—'You are the Messiah, Son of the living God'. What Simon Peter was saying was, 'you are the true King. You are the one Israel has been waiting for'. Simon Peter had recognised Jesus particular relationship to God. Peter must have known that to acknowledge this was risky, but he obviously answered from his heart. He could have said, 'You are a talented speaker and Rabbi, you are a Galilean and a carpenter, but he answered 'You are the presence of God, God's salvation to his people' and Jesus responds by blessing him and telling him that this truth was given to him by God, and he re-enforces Peter's name by calling him 'the Rock on which he will build his church'. Simon Peter himself was to be the foundation for his new building. Just as God gave Abram a new name Abraham indicating that he would be father to many nations, so Jesus gives Simon a new name —Peter, Petra, the Rock. The movement to build a community consisting of all those who give allegiance to Jesus as God's appointed king began there in Caesarea Philippi.

Peter's declaration of faith was the starting point of the church. But it is interesting that it is only in Matthew's gospel that Jesus talks about a 'church'. Alfred Loisy famously preached that 'Jesus preached the kingdom and it was the church that came'. Roger Spiller, in his sermon on this gospel passage says, some would argue that if Jesus was expecting the coming of his kingdom in his lifetime, there would be no need of a church. But by the time Matthew wrote his gospel he was convinced of the necessity for the church in the purpose of God. ----But what a bureaucratic collection of denominations has been created!

If Peter is the Rock then the church is comprised of living stones—it isn't a building but a community that gathers round Jesus, not the numbers who belong to one denomination or another but all those that faithfully witness to the world that Jesus is the bond that joins humanity to God for ever, and gives meaning to life and existence and to the one who has died to show us God's unfathomable love for humankind.

The church today is a testimony to Peter's faith. It exists because Peter and others like him trusted and believed in God's Messiah, despite the circumstances around them, despite the hostility of the religious leaders of the time, despite the persecutions unleashed on them by the Romans, despite the lions unleashed in the Coliseum, and the roadside crucifixions--- All that from Peter's confession of faith.

We are here this morning too because of Peter's expression of faith >2000 years ago. Many of us wonder what it is going to take to make our church grow again. What is it that we need to be doing? What new service shall we offer, what new programmes do we need to start?

But God wants the same of us as he did of those first disciples. He wants us to recognise who Jesus is. We can't like Peter physically walk along side him—even if we could, we might not recognise him. We rely on the Holy Spirit to make him known to us, to reveal his Lordship, to allow us a close relationship. Not because if we have to 'turn or burn' as the old saying goes—come to Jesus or spend eternity in hell. Even John Wesley was once quoted as saying, 'you might be able to scare people into coming to church, but you won't keep them there'. Jesus calls us to choose light rather than darkness, and his call to us is because of his extraordinary love for us that even death is no match for

Jesus wants us to know him, to love him, to allow him to love us back that we might share our relationship with him with others.

Jesus asks us to live his question---to make him our Messiah. And as Paul says to the church in Rome—'Let us be transformed by the renewing of our minds to find what is God's will is for us'. And as we all have different gifts let us work together to bring in God's kingdom on earth and overcome evil with good in the strength of His love. Let us be the living stones of the Jesus church meeting within or without walls. It is then by our actions and not our words

as we try to live his love for the world that the church might grow until all come to know him.

Prayers for forgiveness

Lord you have given us so much,
Yet we give you so very little in return.
There are times when we make enthusiastic promises;
But you know how they fade.
We confess that our words, thoughts and actions often deny our faith in you,
Yet you continue to love us and forgive us.
Help us to turn our commitments into reality; matched to the people we are,
May we be living stones to witness to your love
And may our lives reflect your sacrifice for us. **Amen**

Graham Thompson, Chair Plymouth and Exeter.

Offertory prayer

Prayers of Concern

We pray for our church and all churches who seek a way back to corporate worship---- For ministers and preachers, stewards and laity.

We pray for this government that they might find wisdom and discernment in the decisions that they have to make.

We pray for all those still caught up in the fear of Covid 19 and who have to live with its consequences

For those who have been so adversely affected by lockdown, losing jobs and livelihoods, and all the young whose exam results have turned their lives upside down

We pray for those needing help in Lebanon, Gaza, Syria and Yemen. For those seeking asylum in a new land. Help us to be generous in our hospitality and welcoming in our communities.

We pray for all who struggle with their faith, through self doubt and difficult circumstances

We pray for all who struggle with the dark, the darkness of isolation, of broken family, of rejection because of colour, sexuality or faith.

We pray for all children everywhere

We pray for our sick and those known to us. For the lonely, the broken-hearted, the depressed.

Lord, we commit ourselves to your service.

Accept these are prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

STF 564

**O Thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of scared love
On the mean altar of my heart.**

**There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze
And trembling to its source return
In humble prayer and fervent praise.**

**There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze
And trembling to its source return
In humble prayer and fervent praise.**

**Ready for all thy perfect will
My acts of faith and love repeat
Till death thy endless mercies seal
And make the sacrifice complete.**

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Sending out Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we go our separate ways now, knowing that you are the Son of the living God. Let us share this good news with anyone who will listen, and in our words and actions demonstrate his love for all.

The Grace