

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 1/11/20

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Opening affirmation from Psalm 34: 1-9 ¹

I will extol the Lord at all times; **his praise will always be on my lips.**

I will glory in the Lord; **let the afflicted hear and rejoice.**

Glorify the Lord with me: **let us exalt his name together.**

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; **he delivered me from all my fears.**

Those who look to him are radiant; **their faces are never covered with shame.**

This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; **he saved him out of all his troubles.**

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Taste and see that the Lord is good; **blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.**

Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.

HYMN – STF 745 – Words by William Walsham How (1823-1867)

1

For all the saints, who from their labours rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Thou wast their Rock, their fortress,
and their might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou in the darkness drear their one true light.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
And win, with them, the victor's crown of gold!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

5

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again,
and arms are strong.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on His way.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

From earth's wide bounds,
from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl
streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Prayer of praise

Great and mighty God, holy and good, we worship and adore You. You are perfect love, pure light and absolute truth. You are near and far, around and within, above and below, everywhere present. You are more than anyone can measure or contain, timeless, eternally existing, the great I am. In wonder and praise we worship You, acknowledging You to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Saviour and Life-giver. Accept the praise of our lips and the worship of our hearts. Amen.

Prayer of thanks ²

O God, we give You thanks for all the saints who ever worshipped You
Whether in tin tabernacles or cathedrals,
Weathered stone churches or converted cinemas,
Where Your name was lifted and adored.

We give You thanks for hands lifted in praise:
Manicured hands and hands stained with grease or soil,
Strong hands and those gnarled with age;
Holy hands, used as wave offerings across the land.

We thank You for hardworking saints;
Whether hard-hatted or steel-booted,
Head-scarfed or aproned,
Blue-collared or three-piece-suited,
They left their mark on the earth for You, for us, for our children to come.

Thank you, O God, for the tremendous sacrifices made by those who have gone before us.
Bless our memories of Your saints, God.
May we learn how to live from their examples of faith, dedication, worship, and love.

Reading – Matthew 23: 1-12 ¹

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ²‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practise what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵‘Everything they do is done for people to see: they make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted with respect in the market-places and to be called “Rabbi” by others.

⁸‘But you are not to be called “Rabbi”, for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹And do not call anyone on earth “father”, for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Reflection - Part 1

I admit that sometimes the Bible can be hard work. It comes to us out of the context of a very different time and culture and therefore needs interpreting and cross referring. Yet what is remarkable is how often, given when it was written, how topical and relevant it is. That tells me something important about the timeless wisdom it contains, its focus on the timeless characteristics of human nature and the timelessness of God. If ever there is a topical reading the one we heard today is it. Jesus the man of truth who made the audacious claim to be, to embody the truth, ‘I am the way the truth and the life’, stands in a very public place at the heart of the capital city and calls out the hypocrisy of public figures in his day. It is a prophetic word and a dangerous one.

When he speaks these words he is just a few days away from his death at the instigation of those he called out and shamed for their display of religion, their love of attention and their public acclaim, none of which was built on the solid foundations of their actual living. The charge is of hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another. Does this sound like any situations you can think of among public figures today? Does it remind you of what you can read in your newspaper or see reported on television?

Did you notice how Jesus begins his direct and brave calling out of hypocrisy? It is crucial. Those who hold office, says Jesus, are to be respected because of the office they hold and the law they are in office to uphold even though they themselves may not behave well or do what they tell others to do. Their behaviour does not deny the truth of the law they are in post to uphold. This too is highly relevant to today. Jesus is saying that there is an absolute standard of right behaviour independent of whether it is kept by those appointed and in office to teach and to share it. This was a problem then and it certainly is now. We seem to have lost our trust in absolute standards of right and wrong. Things become relative, relative to how well people behave, relative to public opinion and relative to personal opinion. We operate on a model of 'it's okay if no one gets hurt' even though we can't see the hidden hurts this approach brings. Jesus knew and taught otherwise and he was no authoritarian. As I heard someone say recently he came to lay down his life not to lay down the law. In fact he was regularly accused of law breaking because he lived by the underlying truth of the Law of God and not its worldly and often petty human interpretation. We need to seek the Law of God again and have the courage to stand on it and to live by it. We must not do this in a finger wagging, nit picking or puritanical way but in a loving and generous way, confident it has been given for our common good by God who is good. So let us reflect on this and pray this prayer with me before we look at another important point Jesus alerts us to.

Father, thank you for your law; it is the law of life, of love and hope. It is the law that keeps, guards and guides me. It is the law of peace, of justice and wholeness. I praise you the law-giver for your perfect law of love that shows me right from wrong, the principles by which to live untainted by my opinions, my judgements or my preferences.

Forgive me O God when I neglect, ignore or misuse your law; when I act as if I know better; when I fail to value or respect what you have given for my good. Forgive me when I speak well of your law but fail to live well by it. Forgive me when I see very clearly where others fail to live by your law but cannot see where I fail too.

Silence

Loving God who in Jesus came to fulfil the law, grant me now forgiveness and renewal that the washing of your grace may take away my sin and your law may delight and guide me all my days. Amen.

Reflection - Part 2

'The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.' Are those who are considered great today motivated first and foremost by a desire to serve others? Is that the first essential requirement on the personal specification for high office or public acclaim, I wonder? Many do set out with that intention but it is certainly hard to maintain and so we must pray for our leaders as they navigate the complexities of public life in the intense scrutiny of media attention. It is all too easy to criticise, to point the finger without seeing all the rest of our fingers pointing back at us.

We all need a servant heart whether we have a leadership role or not. We all lead by our example and our influence among our friends and within our family whether we realise it or not. As followers of Jesus this is the life to which we are called. It is not to a life of false humility or being falsely submissive or allowing ourselves to be downtrodden or exploited, it is to a life of servanthood. Here as always Jesus is our example the one who 'being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.....he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross. These are the powerful words of St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians. How we need the help of the Servant King, the greatest of all, in our daily living! How his example would transform our public life and our public discourse if only people would hear and heed it. It is never going to be popular or easy but it is right and true and good. I believe to be the servants of the Servant King is the true calling of God's people. It is to be salt and light in an often dark, damaged and damaging world. It is not something we can do by our own effort alone, it will require a regular pattern of review, repentance and renewal in light of Jesus's shining example. He is waiting to help; it is part of his continuing to be the Servant King who reigns from a cross as well as being the judge of all. So let us sing together that great hymn the Servant King which celebrates the King who serves and whom we follow and serve too.

Hymn - STF 272 ³

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| <p>1. From heaven You came, helpless babe,
entered our world, Your glory veiled;
not to be served but to serve,
and give Your life that we might live.
<i>This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.</i></p> | <p>3. Come see His hands and His feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice;
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.
<i>This is our God, the Servant King,</i></p> |
| <p>2. There in the garden of tears,
my heavy load He chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but Yours,' He said.
<i>This is our God, the Servant King,</i></p> | <p>4. So let us learn how to serve,
and in our lives enthrone Him;
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.
<i>This is our God, the Servant King,</i></p> |

Suggestions for your own prayers

Pray for

- US election and for healing following the divisive election campaign.
- Government and local authorities as they make difficult decisions about resource allocation, public health advice and action.
- For the work of West Berkshire Homeless and all agencies that reach out to those in need of shelter or food.
- For people you know who have lost loved ones in the last year.
- For all who are struggling to readjust following bereavement and those who counsel, advise and support them.
- For those we know in need family, friends, neighbours, members of the church to which you belong. Name them before God now.
- For ourselves - ask God for what you need today.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN STF 363 ⁴

1. In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm, through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.
2. In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save;
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.
3. There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine -
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.
4. No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Final Blessing

May God give us grace to follow the example of the saints in their worship, service and faith. And may the blessing of the God of hope, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, go with us and remain with us, always. Amen.

Acknowledgements

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