

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 17/01/21

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HYMN – SF 2249 ¹

Come, people of the risen King,
who delight to bring him praise.
Come, all and tune your hearts to sing
to the morning star of grace.
From the shifting shadows of the earth
we will lift our eyes to him,
where steady arms of mercy reach
to gather children in.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!
One heart, one voice, O Church of Christ, rejoice!*

Come, those whose joy is morning sun,
and those weeping through the night.
Come, those who tell of battles won,
and those struggling in the fight.
For his perfect love will never change
and his mercies never cease,
but follow us through all our days
with the certain hope of peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!

Come, young and old from every land,
men and women of the faith.
Come, those with full or empty hands,
find the riches of his grace.
Over all the world his people sing –
shore to shore we hear them call,
the truth that cries through every age:
'Our God is all in all!'
Rejoice! Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!

Prayer of praise

Father God, we do indeed come before you as people of our risen King Jesus, delighting to bring you praise. Whatever our circumstances right now, however we're feeling, we choose to praise and worship you today, along with millions of other Christians throughout the world - we rejoice in our Lord.

Father God, you have blessed us in so many ways and we are eternally grateful. Thank you especially today for your precious gift of peace, a peace that the world cannot give, a peace that is beyond our understanding, a peace that comes when we rest in you.

Thank you too that you are a faithful God who never changes in this rapidly changing world. Thank you that we can put our trust in you and that our future is safe in your hands. Amen.

Prayer of Confession ²

God our Father, we come to you in sorrow for our sins.

Father, forgive us:

For turning away from you, and ignoring your will for our lives;

For behaving just as we wish, without thinking of you;

For failing you by what we do, and think and say;

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you by temptations in the world about us;

For living as if we were ashamed to belong to your Son.

Silence

Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to Your truth, strengthen us to do Your will and give us the joy of Your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Reading – Psalm 139 ³

Lord, you know everything there is to know about me.

You perceive every movement of my heart and soul, and you understand my every thought before it even enters my mind.

You are so intimately aware of me, Lord. You read my heart like an open book and you know all the words I'm about to speak before I even start a sentence!

You know every step I will take before my journey even begins.

You've gone into my future to prepare the way, and in kindness you follow behind me to spare me from the harm of my past.

With your hand of love upon my life, you impart a blessing to me.

This is just too wonderful, deep, and incomprehensible!

Your understanding of me brings me wonder and strength.

Where could I go from your Spirit? Where could I run and hide from your face?

If I go up to heaven, you're there! If I go down to the realm of the dead, you're there too!

If I fly with wings into the shining dawn, you're there! If I fly into the radiant sunset, you're there waiting! Wherever I go, your hand will guide me; your strength will empower me.

It's impossible to disappear from you or to ask the darkness to hide me, for your presence is everywhere, bringing light into my night.

There is no such thing as darkness with you. The night, to you, is as bright as the day; there's no difference between the two.

You formed my innermost being, shaping my delicate inside and my intricate outside, and wove them all together in my mother's womb.

I thank you, God, for making me so mysteriously complex! Everything you do is marvellously breath-taking. It simply amazes me to think about it! How thoroughly you know me, Lord!

You even formed every bone in my body when you created me in the secret place, carefully, skillfully shaping me from nothing to something.

You saw who you created me to be before I became me! Before I'd ever seen the light of day, the number of days you planned for me were already recorded in your book.

Every single moment you are thinking of me! How precious and wonderful to consider that you cherish me constantly in your every thought! O God, your desires toward me are more than the grains of sand on every shore! When I awake each morning, you're still with me.

HYMN – STF 628 ⁴

Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, You're my Rock of peace.
Lord of all, I depend on You,
I call out to You again and again.
I call out to You again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm Your love is the anchor,
My hope is in You alone.

Reading – 1 Samuel 3: 1-18 ⁵

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

Then the Lord called Samuel.

Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' And he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.'

But Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.' So he went and lay down.

Again the Lord called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' 'My son,' Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.'

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

A third time the Lord called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.'

Then Eli realised that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."'

So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

And the Lord said to Samuel: 'See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family – from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family for ever because of the sin he knew about; his sons uttered blasphemies against God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, "The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering."'

Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, 'Samuel, my son.' Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' 'What was it he said to you?' Eli asked. 'Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.' So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, 'He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.'

Talk - Part 1

'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.' In the words of an old truism 'generally speaking, God is generally speaking'. In the beginning God said and it was. God spoke through a burning bush through an ass. God spoke to Abraham and to Moses and through many prophets. Above all he spoke through his Son, Jesus, through his words and actions. God communicates. He is the God of revelation. He is not hidden but makes himself known - he is the present One. Why should God not speak to us his people as he has in the past? In this we have before us the example of a child, a special, much-wanted child, dedicated to God even before his conception.

Samuel, who grew up to be a great prophet and leader of the nation in a time of turmoil for his country, learned early on how to listen to God and how to respond when God spoke. So let Samuel be our teacher. There are many lessons we might see, I offer just two today.

Samuel was in the right place to hear God. Significantly for Samuel he was in the temple, the symbolic dwelling place of God. The principle to note here is not about physical places so much as about being in the presence of God, being open and receptive to him. If our minds are occupied with our own thoughts, our own interests and desires then it will be more difficult to hear God. It will be more difficult to listen attentively. It is also true that being in an appropriate place can help, for example where there is quiet, or in a place which, by its atmosphere, is helpful. This will vary for different people. For me being outdoors helps, as does being in an atmosphere of praise and worship. Selwyn Hughes likened hearing God to trying to tune-in to a rather faint radio station. There are stronger signals which clamour for our attention, brash and loud voices and background noise all of which have to be tuned out in order to tune in to God. The required signal is clear enough when the radio is tuned correctly and that requires concentration and practice. Today there is so much happening even when many have much less they are allowed to do. There is so much to absorb and from within which to find God's voice. Where is he speaking and what is he saying in the turmoil of political unrest in America as truth is subverted and justice is turned back? Where is he speaking and what is he saying through the destructive ravages of pandemic, in the grief, the injustice and shaking of individual lives and communities? What is he saying to his church, to the nation and to each one of us individually? CS Lewis famously said 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.'

So God is probably shouting at us right now. We can certainly be sure he is speaking in accordance with his word and with his nature. He will always be true to himself. So let's seek him, put ourselves in the right place to discern his voice both physically and spiritually. 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.'

HYMN – STF 161 ⁶

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Talk – Part 2

Samuel shows us costly obedience. When he is sure that it is God he is listening to, and testing is very important to confirm the word we think we have heard is indeed from God, he chooses to obey no matter how difficult or unpleasant that may be for him. Herein, for many of us, lies the problem. It is not hearing that is the challenge but obedience. When my mother said to me with a certain emphasis, ‘Peter, listen to me!’, I knew she was about to say something important. It may have been a word of encouragement or comfort or rebuke but it was important. The other phrase I learned was, ‘Peter, you weren’t listening!’ This meant I hadn’t taken note of what had been said. I had heard the words but not acted on them. We have to listen in this sense too. Samuel has the same problem. The message he has is in fact for Eli and his family. It is a very distressing one, difficult to pass on to Eli the one to whom Samuel looked for guidance, help and protection. Yet with Eli’s help and insistence he obeyed and confirmed to Eli what the old man already knew, the consequences of failing to discipline and restrain his sons who had treated the sacred temple worship with total disrespect. Eli had failed to stand up against the blasphemy in his own household. God’s ways and laws had been ignored. Eli’s sons thought life would be better without God - that they could manage without these guiding principles. As you can read in the next chapter, the consequences were not just for Eli’s family but for the whole nation. The very symbol of the presence of God, the Ark of the Covenant, would be captured by the nation’s enemies. Eli’s failure to lead spiritually led to political and national failures. Samuel became the first of the great prophets of God in a line through Isaiah and Jeremiah to Jesus himself. All had to warn against the consequences of failure of leadership and failure to follow God’s instructions. Here, for example in Isaiah 59, ‘justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.’

This is not ancient history is it? Doesn’t it remind you of corrupting and corrupted leadership with an emphasis on false truth, conspiracy theory and fake news? Pray for America, for democracy, for Godly leadership. Remember all that is wrong is because of human sin, the kind that lurks in the corners of every human heart, yours and mine. God is speaking still, are we listening? Am I listening? Am I prepared to do what he says? Speak Lord, your servant is listening. Thanks be to God he does not abandon us but offers us the way out through the transforming power of repentance and forgiveness. As Isaiah goes on to say God was ‘appalled that there was no one to intervene, so his own right arm achieved salvation for him.’ That gives us all our only hope. Let’s pray.

Prayer

Loving God help me to be attentive to what you are saying, truly to listen and respond in willing obedience. When I find your call hard to follow give me determination and courage. When the path you call me to walk is hard and steep, give me strength and walk the path with me. When you call me to change my ways, my mind, my assumptions or my prejudices, grant me the power to do so and to persist determinedly in that change. When you call me to the lower place and the lesser way give me true humility. When you call me to sacrifice and costly obedience give me faith and your abiding presence. When you call me to green pastures and refreshing streams grant me the will to share my blessings.

Loving God help me to be content in all circumstances, to praise You above all and to live in thankfulness. May your Kingdom come and your will be done through me. Amen.

Prayer for others

Suggestions for your own prayers

Pray for

- For all who have tested positive this week, all who have been admitted to hospital and all who have been bereaved.
- For all working in health care especially in our local hospitals, GP surgeries and care homes and especially for tired and stressed staff working another long shift in intensive care.
- For those who find themselves in debt as a result of delayed benefit payments, unemployment or unexpected bills. For all who support those who lack food, shelter or the essentials of life.
- For the new President of the USA, his team and advisors.
- For the forgotten conflict zones of the world in Yemen, Libya, Ukraine and Ethiopia.
- For those we know in need family, friends 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 347 - Matthew Bridges (1800-1894) and Godfrey Thring (1823-1903)

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| 1. Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;
hark how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee
and hail him as thy chosen king
through all eternity. | 3. Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save.
His glories now we sing,
who died, and rose on high;
who died, eternal life to bring,
and lives, that death may die. |
| 2. Crown him the Son of God
before the worlds began,
and ye, who tread where he hath trod,
crown him the Son of Man,
who every grief hath known
that wrings the human breast,
and takes and bears them for his own,
that all in him may rest. | 4. Crown him the Lord of heaven,
enthroned in worlds above;
crown him the King, to whom is given
the wondrous name of Love.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou has died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity! |

Final Blessing

May we crown Jesus King of our lives, live by Kingdom values and share Kingdom truth this week and may the blessing, protection and comfort of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and always.

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