

Worship At Home

21st January 2024

The psalmist writes in Psalm 111 -

"Hallelujah! I give thanks to God with everything I've got— Wherever good people gather, and in the congregation. God's works are so great, worth a lifetime of study—endless enjoyment! Splendour and beauty mark his craft; His generosity never gives out. His miracles are his memorial—

This God of Grace, this God of Love. He gave food to those who fear him, He remembered to keep his ancient promise. He proved to his people that he could do what he said: Hand them the nations on a platter—a gift! He manufactures truth and justice;

All his products are guaranteed to last— Never out-of-date, never obsolete, rust-proof. All that he makes and does is honest and true: He paid the ransom for his people, He ordered his Covenant kept forever. He's so personal and holy, worthy of our respect.

The good life begins in the fear of God— Do that and you'll know the blessing of God. His Hallelujah lasts forever!



Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 196 Come, Now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God
Come.

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¹ One day every tongue Will confess You are God, One day every knee will bow,
Still the greatest treasure remains, for those who gladly choose You now.
Come, now is the time to worship

² Willingly we choose to surrender our lives, willingly our knees will bow
With all our heart soul mind and strength, we gladly choose You now.
Come, now is the time to worship

Let us pray,

Gracious and loving God, we come before you with hearts full of praise and thanksgiving for your undeserved gifts of grace and mercy. We are filled with awe over such blessings. Our lives are enriched also with the evidence of your creative power so visible all around us in the beauty of summer. Days alive with seasonal sight and sounds - bee-thronged blossoms, noisy cicada choirs, and songs of colourful birds. Suntanned faces beginning a new school year. These and so many more images remind us also of your holiness - of the sacredness of all life and the environment in which we live and grow. Help us, O God, to use this time of worship to be thankful for the blessings we experience; to confess where we fall short in

our care of and respect for one another and our land, and to draw upon your wisdom and strength as we seek to be Spirit-empowered followers of Jesus Christ. This we pray in Jesus' name.

The Apostle Paul tells us that what is most essential in our conduct as Christians is not knowledge, but love. And that what we know is less important than our being known by God. So, we confess

The times when we have used knowledge to put people down, rather than build them up. God, source of all knowledge, forgive us. When we see people being exploited because of lack of knowledge and do nothing. God, source of all goodness, forgive us. When we have idolised knowledge at the expense of loving and caring for others.

God, source of all love, forgive us. When we have ridiculed others for having a weak and feeble faith because they appear to lack wisdom; God, source of all wisdom, forgive us.

Remind us of Paul's words 'If I have all knowledge but do not have love, I am nothing.'

Touch us, teach us, heal us and make us newly aware of your love and forgiveness. In Jesus' name we pray.

Hear and believe these words of grace: God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17) And so I declare to you: In Jesus Christ we are loved, we are forgiven. Thank you, Lord. **Amen**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 531 My Jesus, my Saviour.

My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like You.
All of my days I want to praise the wonders of Your mighty love.

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My comfort, my shelter. Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship You.

Shout to the Lord all the Earth, let us sing. Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar at the sound of Your name.

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands. Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have, In You

<https://youtu.be/J4HoASDGbwE?si=O1eNP3YBVwFj2wG7>

Reading: Deuteronomy 18: 15-20 and Mark 1: 21-28

Reflection: Who is in Charge?

In the account in the book of Exodus when God called Moses to lead the enslaved people out of Egypt, Moses protested saying, "I've never been a good speaker and I haven't become one since you began to speak to me I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant." God said "Who gives you a mouth? It is I, the Lord - now - go - I'll tell you what to say."



But Moses still said "No, Lord, please send someone else..." But God insisted, promising Moses, help and knowledge about what to say to the people, saying he would help Moses to speak and that he would tell him what to say..."

That's a bit different from the Moses we hear speaking through the reading from Deuteronomy ... Moses is a different person from the one who first spoke with God. He's telling the people that they are going to get someone to tell them what to do - just like him...! He now speaks with authority - the authority bestowed on him by God.



This is a common theme - the exercise of authority.

Even although Moses would no longer be there to lead the people, God would raise up a new prophet just like Moses from among them. The people knew that the role of the prophet was one of tremendous authority and they wondered how they would be able to tell a true prophet from a false one. The answer was that if the prophet's word did not come true in due time, then the prophet was not from God. In contrast, God's prophetic word, spoken with authority, brings results.



Even so, Christians often wonder- how do we know who speaks for God? Sometimes, time alone can tell because we are all accountable for the word of God entrusted to us. In Deuteronomy our reading stresses both continuity with the present and readiness for the future - faithfulness to the authority of God's word to us as we hear it through the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to accomplish God's purpose through us.



In today's gospel, we find Jesus teaching with such authority that things happened. The people there in the Synagogue were overwhelmed with amazement. Twice we hear that people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because he taught them as one who had authority.

What does the word authority conjure up in your mind? Does it suggest negative or positive thoughts? I can remember when I was in primary school, one was so afraid of the headmaster - the principal's - authority that you were scared to even walk past his door. I can still remember creeping past with my heart in my mouth. Maybe principals these days would be the ones to be amazed at such authority. Sadly, however, it was an authority based on the inappropriate use of power leading to fear. Also, sadly, this is also the type of authority experienced by many people here and in so many places around the world. True authority has been compromised when it is based on professional status, success, wealth, and the lack of any sense of moral integrity or ethical behaviour.

The authority Jesus had was a totally different kind of authority - every fibre of his being spoke love and hope and healing. People were astonished because they had never heard anyone speak and act the way Jesus did. The amazement that came over the people shows that they experienced something of the presence of God. That experience was made real as Jesus exercised his authority in service to others, through teaching and healing. In this way, Jesus demonstrates what he will later say to his disciples - and to us - about authority - that it is not for lording it over others, but for serving them, even as he came not to be served but to serve.



So - are we sufficiently amazed at Jesus' teaching? Is the reason that we do not astonish the world more as Christians based on the possibility that we are not sufficiently astonished ourselves? A bored, bland, unsurprisable, unamazed Christian is a contradiction of terms because an authentic meeting with the living Christ has to be an amazing experience now.

The first and lasting source of joy and power is the astonishing miracle that God actually has come, in the person of Jesus Christ, into our world of need and struggle and evil. If we were more astonished at God choosing to act through us, perhaps, like Jesus, we would do more astonishing things to help people meet needs, to be alongside in their struggles, to identify and overcome evil where it exists.

Let us pray for all people everywhere according to their needs. We think first, this week, of those whose lives have been touched by genocide and war. Every death touches many people with grief and sorrow. We cannot comprehend the evil that brings people to try to destroy another race or people who are different. We pray that such acts, such hatred, such bigotry may be overwhelmed by love and empathy - love shown by Jesus to all who hated and tried to destroy Him

We pray for those who work to help those who suffer. Guide their work and give them the strength and resources to do their work. Jesus taught all of us to help and empathise with those who are poorer and less fortunate than ourselves. We pray that you will guide us, in the affluent West, to continue to help those who suffer poverty, ill health, and starvation in Africa, Asia, and the many countries that will suffer for many years from the effects of the tidal waves which destroyed their communities.

We pray for countries in the Middle East - especially Iraq which is trying to embrace democracy, and shake off the old prejudices, violence, and religious dictatorship.

We pray for Israel and Palestine - that they may find a way to live together, side by side, without hatred and violence

Strengthen your church, Lord, to be united in love, understanding, forgiveness and prayer.

We pray for our local leaders, Charlie, Neil, Sam, and Joan. We also pray for the wider Church throughout the world. As the richest nations in the world seeks to try to find solutions for some of the poorest, we pray that their help is guided by commands and instructions - to "love one another, as I have loved you"

We pray for all who suffer in mind or body and for those who care for them. We pray for the sick; for those who mourn; for those without faith, hope or love. We pray for any known to us who are in special need of our prayers at this time. Amen.

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 549 How deep the Father's love

¹ How deep the Father's love for us. How vast beyond all measure.
That He should give His only Son. To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss. The Father turns His face away.
As wounds which mar the Chosen One. Bring many sons to glory.

² Behold the man upon a cross. My sin upon His shoulders.
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice, Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there, Until it was accomplished.
His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished.

³ I will not boast in anything. No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection
Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart His wounds have paid my ransom.

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<https://youtu.be/tzQi7XvKFmA?si=bbtuxtSLnbERVCKt>

Open the eyes of our hearts to the glory of your love. Speak your word of truth and joy. May the mystery revealed in Jesus draw us closer to you. May the wonder of your love fill us with wisdom and peace. As we rejoice in your presence, teach us to seek justice and righteousness. Fill our hearts to overflowing with your hope and joy.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.

Rev. Susan Thorburn, sthorburn@churchofscotland.org.uk

If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you. 4