

Worship: Sunday 23rd August 2020

Who do you say I am?

Introductory music: Christ is the world's light (Christe Sanctorium)

Opening words & prayer

Welcome today as we share together in prayer and praise to God's Name and the hearing of God's Word. I am Karen Smith & I will be leading worship. I hope you enjoy worshipping from your home today, whether you are in your armchair, in the garden, listening as you have a coffee or sat in a favourite place to be close to God at this time. We are together to respond to God's Word as His disciples. Let's prepare for worship with a moment of stillness.

A short time of quiet

When we see only trouble Jesus, be our vision
When we feel only uncertainty Jesus, be our rock
When we hear only bad news Jesus, be our hope
In all the circumstances of our lives
Jesus, our Companion, be a light to our path
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/>

Call to worship

(inspired by Matthew 16:15)

In the name of the Lord Jesus
the bread breaker, the light gatherer, cross carrier
welcome!

May the peace of the Lord Jesus

the peace maker and the temple disturber,
friend of the sinner and companion on the road
be with us all

Let us draw close to the Lord Jesus:
the saviour, the healer, the teacher
and worship him

and ask ourselves
who do we say he is? ~ posted on Spill the Beans. <http://www.spillbeans.org.uk/>

Reading: Matthew 16: 13 - 20 read by Margaret Armes

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 the 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 bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Prayers of Adoration, confession and Lord's Prayer

Lord God, we come before you in humble adoration. How blessed are we that the one who holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven is the one who has the key to our heart. Thank you, God, for the privilege of being part of the amazing story of faith that sustained our ancestors. Thank you, God, that we know our future is safe with you.

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While we may yearn to be like Jesus,
we know that in our hot - headed choices, our frantic lives, our
impetuous words, we are too often like Peter.
But like him, we can confess Christ as our Lord,
speaking of our need for your saving presence in our lives.

We look for you in all the wrong places, God of the lost,
and wonder why we cannot find you.
We wander the corridors of power,
while you are on the sidewalks, beside the homeless.
We sit at the head tables of the world,
while you are handing out soup to the hungry at the kitchen's
backdoor.
We applaud those who win the race, while you are cheering on
those in last place.
In forgiving us, God of new life,
you would transform our cold hearts into those melted in service to
others.
In granting us mercy, you challenge us to think of all those we have
ignored.
In gifting us with grace, you enable us to proclaim Jesus Christ, our
Lord and Saviour, as the hope, the joy, the peace the world seeks.

Silence

Assurance of Pardon

It is Christ's gift which transforms us into God's children.
It is more than just how we think.
In mercy and grace, our hearts, our lives, our spirits
are transfigured and made new.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

—adapted by Karen Smith from Thom Shuman, and posted on his blog, [Lectionary Liturgies](#).

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done,**

**in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those that 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**

Reading: Isaiah 51: 1 – 6 read by Brian Armes

1 Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. 2 Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. 3 For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

4 Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. 5 I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

Hymn: At the name of Jesus (Sung by the Newcastle Cathedral virtual choir project)

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him King of glory now:
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

At his voice creation sprang at once to sight,
All the angels faces, all the hosts of light,
Thrones and Dominations, stars upon their way,
All the heavenly orders, in their great array.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name
From the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious, when from death he passed:

Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures, to the central height,
To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
All that is not holy, all that is not true:
He is God the Saviour, he is Christ the Lord, ever to be worshipped,
trusted, and adored.

One day this Lord Jesus shall return again,
With the Father's glory, with his angel train;
For all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow, and our hearts
confess him King of glory now.

Reflection

But who do you say I am?

Over 25 years ago, I made a career change from working in industry to teaching. It fitted well with having a young family and as someone who loves to learn, and having spent several years training others in my previous job, I decided Further Education teaching was for me. It wasn't an easy transition. I had to set aside my naïve expectation that students were as inspired to learn as I was pretty quickly and flip it to carry them along with me through building trust, respect and having the biggest sense of humour possible!

I loved teaching, so much so that a career move within my second career was to become a teacher trainer. Trainee teachers often were focussed on the teaching, as opposed to the learning and involvement of the students, so I did a lot of work developing question techniques with them. Often the first style of questioning they forced themselves to apply was open questioning – you know: who, what, why, when and how. You can't mumble a yes or no in reply. It requires an answer. The change in involvement, sharing thoughts and building a secure place to learn was electric in many cases & connections would build between the trainee and their class groups as they explored ideas together. Learning was nurtured and grown.

Now what's this got to do with today's reading, you may ask! We heard in our reading from Matthew's Gospel of a conversation between Jesus and his disciples, set at the most northern point of the journey taken during Jesus's ministry – a place steeped in pagan worship with the famous Cave of Pan, where people were reported to have received revelations from the god Pan. It was a lush oasis and overlooked a fertile northern source of the Jordan. They were deep in pagan territory.

It's the shape of the conversation that resonated with the teacher in me as I recognised the teacher in him. Jesus starts with an open question – the disciples are sharing what they already know from what they've heard & then he gets to the point – But who do you say I am? This is not an objective question with a right or wrong answer, but one that demands engagement, promotes thinking & it's insistent and important, demanding an answer. They may not be in the safest political and geographical place, but their relationship with Jesus gives Peter the confidence to answer, to declare that Jesus is the one they have been looking for, the one they need who comes from God. A community of faith is founded at that moment that is new and different & continues to be new and different to this day – church.

And Jesus draws out the learning that has happened for Peter and has been revealed to him gradually as Peter grew in faith over the months and years he spent travelling and learning from Jesus. Throughout history, God has revealed his message gradually; our reading from Isaiah shows us that by reminding us his people started with Abraham and those that followed have been learning about who he is down the years. Faith needs to mature and grow so we can hear and understand; we need to feed it and continue to nurture it as part of our discipleship, however long we have been on the journey.

Christ the teacher made me stop and think when I read the Gospel passage, in August 2020: who do I say he is – to you, to anyone, in what I say and how I live when I say I am a Christian. To be able to give voice to that I had to think about how I identify with Jesus and how open I am to everyone about my faith. We have all been uncertain about telling someone about our faith, I'm sure, but as we grow and mature in our faith we know we can be like Peter and declare it aloud. We know Peter was once afraid to say it, learned from his denial in the Gospels, and the Book of Acts and the epistles of the New Testament show us that as his faith grew, by sharing that belief with others, this companion of Jesus continued to grow in confidence and openly declared who Jesus is to the world. We are privileged to have these writings to read, consider and explore as a foundation for our own faith – they call out to us for thoughtful reading to help us nurture our growth and discipleship so when we are asked, we too can respond with confidence and belief.

Yes, initially I could recognise the teacher aspect because of my personal vocation as a teacher. If we think about it and anyone asked, week in and week out we identify who Jesus is for us in our prayers and hymns- our hope, our companion, our saviour, healer, giver of grace, mercy, joy & peace, friend of the sinner and Son of the living God. There must be many more and some that speak more to you at whatever stage your personal faith journey is.

So what do you say? Imagine being sat by Jesus in beautiful, lush Caesarea Philippi and he looks at you and says 'But who do you say I am?' The questioner, the question demands a response. Can you, will you be ready to answer?

Prayers of Intercession

Lord God, we thank you for what you are doing in our own lives:
Growing us to be mature in our faith.
Growing us to be more like Jesus.
Growing us to be loving of others and especially the unloved.

And Lord, we come bringing our petitions for those in need.

We now pray for those in our midst who need healing, in the hospital, home recovering, in rehabilitation, those waiting for results of tests. *Pause*

We pray for those who are grieving today: may they be comforted, re-find their way, be strengthened and encouraged. *Pause*

We pray for those who are in financial distress, facing foreclosure, loss of job, long-term unemployment. May their prayers be heard, jobs found, ease of finances, and the ability to pay their bills. *Pause*

And Lord we come bringing our prayers for our communities, our countries and the nations. *Pause*

It feels as if we live in tumultuous times everywhere - economies are in dire straits, bringing other problems with it. There is rioting, protests, fighting. There are famines, food scarcities, medical supplies shortages, high unemployment, the list could go on. It appears that sometimes the nation's leaders seem helpless or powerless.

Lord we need you to intervene in our world to put right the wrong, to guide our leaders, to relieve the suffering and pain and to offer real hope to the world.

We believe our help is in you, LORD, who made heaven and earth.
We believe that we all are one body of Christ working in this world,
in ministry to this world. We believe that on the rock you are building
your church.

You gave us the keys of the kingdom of heaven to have complete
and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every
door: no more barriers.

Let us then be your church in the world. Amen

Adapted from: <https://revgalblogpals.org/2011/08/21/prayer-for-sunday-proper-16aordinary-21apentecost-10/>

Sung closing prayer:

Hymn: God to enfold you (StF 648) Kathy Le Fanu

Sung to 'Morning has broken'

God to enfold you,
Christ to uphold you,
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight;
so may God grace you,
heal and embrace you,
lead you through darkness
into the light.

John L. Bell (b. 1949)

Blessing

As we leave this time of worship, creator of all, our Lord and our all,
we ask that you strengthen us and give us faith that we should grow
as disciples. We pray our hearts be revived with hope and our lives
will always speak of your goodness.

Amen.

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Video recording produced by Anna & Karen Smith

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