

Online Worship: Sunday 18th October

The Jesus Influence

Introductory music: The Kingdom of God is justice and joy

sung by the Newcastle Virtual Choir Project by permission

Welcome

Hello and welcome to our service this morning. This is a service of praise and thanksgiving we share together. We will hear readings from the Scriptures from members of Fleet URC. We will pray together, open to sharing our joys and concerns with our God and we will think about how God speaks to us through the exploration of the readings our Minister, the Reverend Ruth Dillon, will share with us today.

Let's take a moment to be quiet at this time of worship to seek to know God's presence more deeply. *Pause*

Prayer of Approach

Loving Lord Jesus, we come into Your presence this morning to worship and praise You. We come from different places, different families and different circumstances. However we have come here today – whether the last week has been good or bad, whether we have known joy or sorrow, let us leave our cares and concerns aside and come united in our faith and hopes for the future. Amen

Our Call to Worship has a response which you will see on the transcript. Please join in with the words in bold.

Call to worship

We come in reverent awe before the Lord our God—
for great is the Lord!

We come, to join with all creation

in singing new songs to the Lord our God.

We come in worship and praise—
for the Lord God is worthy of our praise!

**We come, to share together
the news of our Glorious Lord's saving deeds.**

We come with songs and prayers—
to give well-deserved glory to the Lord!

**We come, to bring our offerings of worship and praise
to the Lord God—
whose holy splendour, honour and majesty
shines forth from God's presence. Amen.**

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Prayers of Thanksgiving, confession and the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray together.

Living God, we thank You today for the gift of praise. Thank you for revealing Yourself to us through Your Word, by Your Spirit, and in Your creation, that we might stand in awe of You. You alone are worthy of praise and glory and honour, for You have created all things. For every request that we offer, every supplication that we raise, and every intercession we make, let us never neglect to render the praise You are due. In the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

(based on 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10)

God of Grace,
we know that you have chosen us,
but we often forget that you have also chosen others.
You call us to be imitators of Christ,
yet many times we are imitators of our world.
You challenge us to turn from our idols,
but we are tempted to turn back to them again and again.

Rescue us, Lord, from ourselves.

Show us the way.

Guide our every action,

that we may live as you call us to live.

~ written by Amy Loving, and posted on **The Worship**

Closet. <http://worshipcloset.com/words-for-worship-18th-sunday-after-pentecost/>

Today we ask for your forgiveness

for living without your presence in our lives:

for relying on our own achievements;

for believing that we are the architects of our own destiny;

for living as though you have no place in our modern world.

Forgive us, restore us,
renew us and equip us
to do Your will on earth,
until the dawning of your heavenly Kingdom.
Help us to find the riches of your grace,
as we hear your word and meet with you in prayer.

Adapted from — from [Starters for Sunday](#), on the Church of Scotland's website.

This we ask as we pray in the words which you taught to your disciples saying,

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

We are now going to hear today's readings, read to us by members of Fleet URC – our thanks to Alan Tyler & Elizabeth English

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1: 1- 10 read by Alan Tyler

1 Paul, Silas^[a] and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. **3** We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers and sisters^[b] loved by God, that he has chosen you, **5** because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. **6** You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. **7** And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. **8** The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, **9** for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, **10** and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Reading: Matthew 22: 15 -22 read by Elizabeth English

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. **16** They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. **17** Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax^[a] to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”²¹ “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Hymn: I want to walk with Jesus Christ

I want to walk with Jesus Christ
All the days I live of this life on earth,
To give to him complete control
Of body and of soul:
Follow him, follow him, yield your life to him,
He has conquered death, he is King of Kings.
Accept the joy which he gives to those
Who yield their lives to him.

I want to learn to speak to him,
To pray to him, to confess my sin,
To open my life and let him in,
For joy will then be mine:
Follow him, follow him, yield your life to him,
He has conquered death, he is King of Kings.
Accept the joy which he gives to those
Who yield their lives to him.

I want to learn to read his word,
For this is how I know the way,
To live my life as pleases him,
In holiness and joy:
Follow him, follow him, yield your life to him,
He has conquered death, he is King of Kings.
Accept the joy which he gives to those
Who yield their lives to him.

I want to learn to speak of him;
My life must show that he lives in me,
My deeds, my thoughts, my words must speak
Of all his love for me:
Follow him, follow him, yield your life to him,
He has conquered death, he is King of Kings.
Accept the joy which he gives to those
Who yield their lives to him.

O holy Spirit of the Lord,
Enter now int this heart of mine,
Take full control of my selfish will
And make me wholly thine:
Follow him, follow him, yield your life to him,
He has conquered death, he is King of Kings.
Accept the joy which he gives to those
Who yield their lives to him. C.Simmonds 1964 Rejoice & Sing 367

Reflection:

Do any of you remember a book called ‘**How to win friends and influence people**’? The book was published in 1936 by Dale Carnegie and it has sold over 30 million copies, with 17 editions printed in its first year and translated into every known language in the world. It gives techniques on how to handle people, ways to make people like you, how to be an effective leader and how to handle criticism. It was the book to have on your bookshelf in the sixties, and yes, my father had a copy on his bookshelf, and you may still have one.

In 2011 it was number 19 on the Times magazine list of the 100 most influential books... however it was beaten hands down by the number one book, The Holy Bible.

The Bible is still seen as the most influential book of our time. Why? Because it contains 3 core elements: Truth, Justice and Commitment.

Even though neither the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, nor Carnegie’s book was to hand when Paul visited the

church in Thessalonica, Paul wanted to share the elements that influenced him to be a missionary and share the three core gospel values of Truth, Justice and Commitment – all qualities that Jesus had.

- **Truth**

The truth for our early Christians in Thessalonica is that they owed their 'identity' to God, not to Julius Caesar, whose face was on all the coins of the day. This writing from Paul is only 20 years after Jesus' death, yet Jesus' influence and teaching is already spreading across the mainland to Thessalonica through the travels of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. The truth that Jesus had lived, died and, more importantly, resurrected, meant that God was Living God, a God who came to earth, lived a life as we do, died, and yet death was not the end, for Jesus broke the chains of death, and was risen and so is eternal ... Jesus was no magician, as some of the prophets around at that time claimed, but a living Christ who is alive for his people today. The tension between our faith and civil authorities has a similar ring to it. In today's context, we also have to speak the truth in the midst of government policies, for as the United Reformed Church, we are 'distinct from the Government of the state'; therefore our call is to influence others, just as Jesus has influenced us with the truth and ways to live a life in service to others, for God and for our neighbour.

- **Justice**

As I mentioned earlier, the early Christians in Thessalonica existed in a time of tension and challenges; however, justice was the centre of their calling. A belief that all should hear the gospel despite the influence of the Greek and Roman cultures, and the many other cultures that had landed on their shores. However, the reality of living a life which brought justice and equality for all was difficult to adhere to. The society at the time embraced the structure of slavery, inequality between men and women, and the status of slaves and masters. The influence of Jesus within this culture was immense, as Early Christians taught about loving your neighbour, and supporting one another in Christian fellowship, and this was one of the main reasons for their increased congregations. Today we can

sometimes find it difficult to speak out for justice; however if the passion within us is strong, we cannot help but speak out against injustice, for that is how the life of Jesus has influenced us - not to be complacent, but to be active in our seeking to do good.

- **Commitment**

Finally, Paul's influence on them is to be committed to Christ who is the foundation all goodness. In this early theological letter to the church in Thessalonica we start to see the evolving way that Jesus' influence on Paul, starting on the road to Damascus, is starting to influence others. The commitment that he accepted is so strong that he feels passionately that the people of Thessalonica should have that same commitment, where Jesus' influence starts to flow to others.

- To be committed, we need to know what we are committed to. Is it praise to God?
- Or to do justice and walk humbly with God?
- Or is it, similar to the Story of the Good Samaritan, service to others?

Only you can answer that question.

Jesus has influenced our lives, our thinking and our understanding so much. However, one question that is still asked of Christians today, is how do we gain spiritual resilience?

Is it something that grows within us, acquired or taught?

One could do a thesis exploring that question for it is still relevant in our context as well to the early Christians. In the midst of chaos, this letter to the church in Thessalonica is ultimately a letter of Hope.

It is a letter of memory: Paul remembering his friends in Thessalonica, as their Christian life was strewn with anger and painful opposition to their local Christian community.

So, Paul looks back with pride and yet sadness at the pressures this new community had to face. Yet this is also a letter of hope and endurance: what God begins, God sustains.

Prayers of Intercession

We join together for our prayers of intercession. There will be times of silence for you to bring your personal prayers to God. So now let us pray together.

Lord, we bring to You now our prayers for others and for ourselves.

Lord, we ask that You bless and guide Your church in Fleet and Beacon Hill, Hindhead and throughout the world, helping us to reach out to others, sharing with them the good news of Christ and standing with those who are most in need of our help, love and support.

Silence

Guide us in our relationships with others, within our families, with friends, neighbours and those who we struggle to love or try to avoid.

Silence

Fill our homes and communities with the warmth of Your love, may we learn to love and accept all. Pour out Your Spirit into the world, bless those struggling with poverty and homelessness, evil and war. Help us to reach out to those who are in need.

Silence

Bless those who are ill at home or in hospital, those who are feeling anxious or low, feeling like they would rather just give up than live on. We think especially of Peter Bramley. May they know Your love and sense Your presence with them and may we as a church reach out to them in their time of need.

Silence

Bless the leaders of nations and people. Guide them in the decisions that they make ensuring they work hard and fight for the people they represent.

Silence

Lord, may we always sense Your presence in our lives and in the lives of others. Transform us to be the people that You would have us be. All of this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. **Amen**

As we come to the close of our service this morning we return to Ruth, who will lead us in our closing prayer and blessing.

Closing prayer:

God of truth: instil in us wisdom and clarity of mind
As we walk the way

God of justice: Instil in us a passion for your people and to break down barriers of division
As we walk the way

God of commitment: instil in us a desire to service and be steadfast in our love for you
as we walk the way

May the influence of Jesus who is our guide and goal, permeate throughout our mind , body and soul until we are one with you .

Blessing:

May the blessing of God who is truly beyond all human understanding,
remain in our hearts and minds this day and each day.
Amen

Closing Music: The Kingdom of God is justice and joy

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Video recording produced by Anna & Karen Smith October 2020