

**Worship for Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021 (complete text. A video version is also online)**  
**Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

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*Welcome to all of you joining us for this service.*

*I am Anne Oliver, your worship leader on this last Sunday in August. Our Bible readings will be provided by friends from the Mickleton and Radford Road churches, and the Rev. Audrey Simpson will be sharing her reflections on God's Word. We hope that you will feel that God has spoken to you through this worship, and I thank those whose technical expertise has made it possible.*

*Today we are saying goodbye to the Rev. Sam McBratney, and we thank him for his ministry in our circuit.*

*As the new Methodist year begins this week, we are very pleased to be welcoming the Rev. Sally Jones to minister in the Warwick, Wellesbourne and Whitnash churches. Sally will be living in the Warwick manse, and we are looking forward to getting to know her and her family.*

#### THE PREPARATION

##### **Call to Worship:**

Today, in this service, may we bring to God  
not only the words on our lips,  
but the praise in our hearts.  
May we bring our honesty and bravery,  
our anxiety and fears,  
all that we carry in our hearts.  
May we meet with Jesus,  
who accepts us – flaws and all –  
with forgiveness and grace.

##### **Our first hymn is number 24 in StF "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.**

**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 ...**

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

##### **A prayer of approach**

Unchanging God,  
refresher, healer and restorer,  
give us wisdom and discernment today.  
We come to seek you and to hear you,  
to be still and present with you,  
to be transformed. Amen.

##### **A prayer of adoration**

Father of light,  
Father of truth and wisdom,  
we worship you and adore you.  
Turn us inside out as we bow at your throne  
today.  
Let our light shine through you in the darkness,  
most merciful and gracious God. Amen

##### **Let us make our confession to God:**

Unblemished God, forgive us  
when we adhere to laws that are not of you,  
when we criticise others because their ways are  
not our ways.  
Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have not supported one another in love,  
or protected those that are vulnerable.  
Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have corrupted your laws and gone our  
own way,  
or when we have not nurtured those in our  
families  
and communities and let them go astray.  
Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

Help us to live as one community,  
bound together in love and grace.  
Help us to live alongside each other  
and be there for one another.  
Amen.

**Declaration of forgiveness:**

Thank you, O God, that we are a forgiven people,  
cleansed and restored by you,  
made pure in your image.  
Today we are free because of the cross.  
Amen.

**Our 2<sup>nd</sup> hymn is no. 372 in StF "Come down, O Love Divine"**

- 1 **Come down, O Love divine,  
seek thou this soul of mine,  
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing ;  
O Comforter, draw near,  
within my heart appear,  
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.**
- 2 **O let it freely burn,  
till earthly passions turn  
to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming ;  
and let thy glorious light  
shine ever on my sight,  
and clothe me round, the while my path  
illuminating.**
- 3 **Let holy charity  
mine outward vesture be,  
and lowliness become mine inner clothing ;  
true lowliness of heart,  
which takes the humbler part,  
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with  
loathing.**
- 4 **And so the yearning strong,  
with which the soul will long,  
shall far outpass the power of human telling ;  
for none can guess its grace,  
till he become the place  
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.**

Bianco da Siena (*d.* 1434)  
*translated by* Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–  
1890)

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

OLD TESTAMENT READING

**Song of Solomon 2:8-13 (NRSV)**

The voice of my beloved!  
Look, he comes,  
leaping upon the mountains,  
bounding over the hills.  
My beloved is like a gazelle  
or a young stag.  
Look, there he stands  
behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows,  
looking through the lattice.  
My beloved speaks and says to me:  
'Arise, my love, my fair one,  
and come away;  
for now the winter is past,  
the rain is over and gone.  
The flowers appear on the earth;  
the time of singing has come,  
and the voice of the turtle-dove  
is heard in our land.  
The fig tree puts forth its figs,  
and the vines are in blossom;  
they give forth fragrance.  
Arise, my love, my fair one,  
and come away.

**Psalm 45 (NRSV)**

**Ode for a Royal Wedding**

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of the Korahites. A  
Maskil. A love song.  
My heart overflows with a goodly theme;  
I address my verses to the king;  
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.  
You are the most handsome of men;  
grace is poured upon your lips;  
therefore God has blessed you for ever.  
Your throne, O God, endures for ever and ever.  
Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity;  
you love righteousness and hate wickedness.  
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
with the oil of gladness beyond your  
companions;  
your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes

and cassia.  
From ivory palaces stringed instruments make  
you glad;  
daughters of kings are among your ladies of  
honour;  
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of  
Ophir.

#### NEW TESTAMENT READING

#### **James 1:17-27 (NRSV)**

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

#### **Hearing and Doing the Word**

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

#### GOSPEL

#### **Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (NRSV)**

#### **The Tradition of the Elders**

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines." You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.' For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

#### SERMON

Jesus is so riled in our gospel today that he calls those who question the actions of his disciple 'hypocrites'. In Mark's gospel you may have noticed a recurring theme. Often when Jesus is involved in good, gracious and life transforming activity what follows is conflict with the religious leaders. Prior to this debate with the Pharisees Jesus has fed more than 5000 people physically and spiritually.

The Pharisees have noticed that Jesus' people don't all follow the tradition of washing their hands before eating. In this case the washing of the hands has nothing to do with hygiene but was a ceremonial practice that emphasised respect for God and symbolised purity. The washing of hands before eating was a wonderful way of remembering the presence and providence of God at mealtime – much as some would offer a grace before eating today. This tradition was intended to be constructive and helpful.

Think for a moment of some of the religious rituals and patterns you employ that help you worship God and serve him in the world.

No doubt you will agree that such traditions can be valuable as they offer consistency, provide a common symbolic practice that everyone understands, create a sense of shared history and of being connected to a previous generation.

Indeed, the word tradition means to transmit. A previous generation of followers of God find a particular practice useful and precious and they hand it on to the next generation as a blessing in the hope that it may be useful and precious to them.

However, problems arise when loyalty to the tradition becomes an end in itself or becomes a burden rather than a joy or becomes empty and hollow. Then tradition has shifted into traditionalism which is more about the person following the tradition than about God. This is what seems to have happened with the religious leaders in Jesus' day. More than 5000 have been fed spiritually and physically and what do the Pharisees notice - that the ceremonial handwashing hasn't taken place! Their spiritual compass is well out of kilter.

Think for a moment of some of the religious rituals and patterns you employ that have become hollow and empty and that no longer help you worship God and serve him in the world.

The Lutheran theologian Jarislov Pelikan wrote:

*'Tradition is the living faith of the dead.  
Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living'*

Jesus identifies this shift in those who point the accusing finger at his disciples. They have shifted from faith and life affirming, God focussed, tradition, to faith and life shackling, person focussed, traditionalism.

If you look at Mark 7: verses 9-13, which were not included in the reading for today, you hear that Jesus gives an example of how the Pharisees have made the giving of a particular offering more important than the care of the older generation even though the care of the elders is called for in the 10 commandments. They focus on what makes them look and feel good and not on the need of their elders.

In calling out the hypocrisy of his opponents Jesus quotes Isaiah:

*'This people honours me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me;  
in vain do they worship me,  
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'*

*<sup>8</sup>You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'*

Jesus is as good as saying that his disciples act out of love of God and compassion for people whereas the actions of the Pharisees display selfish hearts. In the gospel Jesus then lists the evils that can come from a selfish heart.

So, Jesus calls for hearts that are right with God. The reading from James begins to tell us what that looks like. Over the next 5 weeks the second New Testament Reading will come from James who, through proverbs and wisdom, will propound that the person whose heart is right with God will not keep their faith as a private matter but will live it out as those who are not only hearers but doers of the word.

For James, the word, the Logos, Christ, is planted in our hearts. For James the faithfulness of the follower is evidenced not by what they say they believe but in how they live what they believe. James doesn't pull his punches as he writes: *v27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

Think for a moment of some of the ways you care for those most in need in society.

On hearing from St Mark and St James today let us reflect on our religious practice and its relationship with faithful living.

Let them not be in conflict.

Let go of any shackling traditions that are more about us than God. Employ traditions that are faith and life affirming and that are God focussed.

Let us, with hearts that are right with God, live out in daily living what we believe -helped not hampered by our religious practices.

**Our 3<sup>rd</sup> hymn is StF 477 Teach me to dance**

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,  
teach me to move in the power of your  
Spirit,  
teach me to walk in the light of your  
presence,  
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.  
Teach me to love with your heart of  
compassion,  
teach me to trust in the word of your  
promise,  
teach me to hope in the day of your coming,  
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

- 1** You wrote the rhythm of life,  
created heaven and earth ;  
in you is joy without measure.  
So, like a child in your sight,  
I dance to see your delight,  
for I was made for your pleasure,  
pleasure.
- 2** Let all my movements express  
a heart that loves to say 'yes,'  
a will that leaps to obey you.  
Let all my energy blaze  
to see the joy in your face,  
let my whole being praise you,  
praise you.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) and Steve Thompson

## **Prayer of thanksgiving**

Thank you, Lord, for our communities.

Thank you that you have set us where you want us to be.

Thank you for those who support us.

Thank you that you give us strength to help each other.

Thank you that you can turn us inside out as we work together to make our communities the places you want them to be.

Thank you for the strength to be doers and hearers of the word.

Thank you that every perfect gift is from you. **Amen.**

**Our 4<sup>th</sup> hymn is no. 615 from StF "Let Love be real, in giving and receiving**

- 1** Let love be real, in giving and receiving,  
without the need to manage and to own ;  
a haven free from posing and pretending,  
where every weakness may be safely known.  
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,  
give me your love wherever we may go.  
*As God loves us, so let us love each other :  
with no demands, just open hands and space  
to grow.*
- 2** Let love be real, not grasping or confining,  
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us  
free ;  
that helps us face the risk of truly living,  
and makes us brave to be what we might be.  
Give me your strength when all my words are  
weakness ;  
give me your love in spite of all you know.
- 3** Let love be real, with no manipulation,  
no secret wish to harness or control ;  
let us accept each other's incompleteness,  
and share the joy of learning to be whole.  
Give me your hope through dreams and  
disappointments ;  
give me your trust when all my failings show.

Michael Forster (b. 1946)

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As we join together in our prayers of intercession, we think about the news from around the world this week and pray that God will be with those who are suffering and in despair.

LET US PRAY:

God of justice,  
we live in an unjust world.  
We are all too aware that shame stalks the corridors of power  
and that hypocrisy is second nature to many.

God, in your mercy,  
remove the dinginess of disgrace and discrimination,  
revealing truth, promoting light, and calling the world  
to see the witness of your beloved Son.

Grant us all wisdom in how we conduct our lives  
and in how we interact with others.  
Make us doers of your word and bringers of peace.

Where there is nothing but cruelty,  
may we plant the seeds of kindness.  
Where life is full of the fake and the false,  
make us advocates of truth.

May those in power not be trigger-happy with their retorts,  
but thoughtful and wise.  
Give us discernment in how we respond  
to the myriad voices and the plethora of opinions  
that surround us in today's world.

May we seek what is genuine.  
May we choose what is real.  
For Jesus' sake.  
Amen.

**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray together:**

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

on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin 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.

### Offertory Prayer

Our offerings may be received by our churches in different ways at this time,  
but we still offer them up to God today.  
Everything in heaven and earth comes from you, O Lord,  
and of your own do we give you.  
**May you be praised for ever. Amen.**

Our final hymn is a great Charles Wesley hymn on Christian perfection; maybe you would like to stand and join in as we conclude our worship together? It is

### StF no. 503 "Love Divine, all loves excelling"

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art ;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.**
- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive ;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.**

**3 Finish then thy new creation,  
pure and spotless let us be ;  
let us see thy great salvation,  
perfectly restored in thee :  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise !**

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

**A sending out prayer & blessing:**

Lord, go with us into our everyday lives,  
to honour you in all that we do and say.  
May our being and doing  
reflect your love and your grace.  
And when we next meet,  
may we recognise with thanks  
the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

And the blessing of God,  
the Father, Son & Holy Spirit  
be among us and remain with us always.  
Amen.

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StF 503 Love divine all love's excelling Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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#### NRSV & NRSVA

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*If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on*  
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