

Worship for Sunday before Advent (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to worship with the South Warwickshire Methodist circuit.

As we are moving into our second “Covid winter”, our preacher Nigel Saxton’s theme is “Facing daily difficulties with Jesus”. We hope that you will find encouragement from our service, and that you will feel that God has spoken to you through this worship; and I thank those whose technical expertise has made it possible.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

We believe we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Therefore let us wait for the Lord, be strong, and let our hearts take courage. (From Psalm 27)

Amen.

Our first hymn is number 72 in StF “Father God I wonder how I managed to exist without the knowledge of your parenthood and your loving care”

Hymn: StF 72 – Father God I wonder

**Father God, I wonder
how I managed to exist
without the knowledge
of your parenthood
and your loving care.
But now I am your child,
I am adopted in your family,
and I can never be alone
'cause, Father God,
you're there beside me.**

**I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises forever more.
I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises forever more.**

Ian Smale (*b.* 1949)

Prayer of approach

Risen Lord Jesus, you call us by name.

You number the hairs of our head.

You know all our needs before we ask.

We bring you our emptiness and come seeking your love.

We bring you our sorrows and come seeking your joy.

We bring you our fears and come seeking your peace.

Amen.

Prayer of adoration

Father God, you are almighty and all knowing.

Thank you for your care of us and for the gifts you have given to us as individuals. Help us to use them well as we seek to live to please you.

Lord Jesus, when you were on earth you showed love towards those who followed you, but you also made demands on their lives. You do not expect us to sit back as your disciples and wait for everything to come to us. Help us to live life to the full as you did, and to know that you understand when we go through the hard times.

Holy Spirit, you have been present at every important event in history. Thank you that you

have shown us Jesus and that he has given us the gift of the Spirit to be with us always. Just as you led Jesus in the desert, help us to see you at work as we allow you to lead us and show us the way to go.

Holy God, three in one, we worship you with our lips. We pray that we may also worship you with our lives in the week ahead.

Amen.

Prayer of confession

Merciful God,
you are the potter and we are the clay.
We are made by you for a purpose,
yet at times we purposely ignore or avoid
the plans you have for us.

At other moments we allow our
busyness, impetuosity and
indecision to intervene.

Forgive us.

Give us the patience to wait on your word,
the sensitivity to hear it,
the courage to act on it
and the wisdom to apply it.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Declaration of forgiveness

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is His gracious word:

"Your sins are forgiven".

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: StF 519 – Father I place into your hands

- 1. Father, I place into your hands
the things I cannot do.
Father, I place into your hands
the times that I've been through.
Father, I place into your hands
the way that I should go,
for I know I always can trust you.**

- 2. Father, I place into your hands
my friends and family.
Father, I place into your hands
the things that trouble me.
Father, I place into your hands
the person I would be,
for I know I always can trust you.**
- 3. Father, we love to see your face,
we love to hear your voice.
Father, we love to sing your praise
and in your name rejoice.
Father, we love to walk with you
and in your presence rest,
for we know we always can trust you.**
- 4. Father, I want to be with you
and do the things you do.
Father, I want to speak the words
that you are speaking too.
Father, I want to love the ones
that you will draw to you,
for I know that I am one with you.**

Jenny Hewer (*b.* 1945)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 27 (NRSVA)

Triumphant Song of Confidence

¹The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

⁴One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

⁶Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!'
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

⁹ Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!

¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will take me up.

¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the
Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!

Matthew 15:12-20 (NRSVA)

¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?' ¹³He answered, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.' ¹⁵But Peter said to him, 'Explain this parable to us.' ¹⁶Then he said, 'Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.'

Mark 1:32-39 (NRSVA)

³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' ³⁸He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Mark 11:27-33 (NRSVA)

Jesus' Authority Is Questioned

²⁷Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him ²⁸and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?' ²⁹Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.' ³¹They argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?"' ³²But shall we say, "Of human origin"?'—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. ³³So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

Sermon

Facing Daily Difficulties with Jesus.

Firstly thanks – to all who contribute to make this service become a reality. You are not taken for granted and it would soon get noticed if what you do did NOT happen. A preacher has various roles such as to challenge, to encourage and to comfort. Hopefully all of these elements will appear this morning.

As we move into the winter months, gloomy weather can be accompanied by gloomy expectations – especially if we listen to the news. Without God's laws there are no healthy relationships, no safe communities and there is no hope of justice. Now happiness and joy are different things. Happiness depends on circumstances – and lots of us are taking a hit from Covid – the bigger our families the more likely this is. However as believers in Jesus we can still have joy. We need to fight for joy and for

those of us who, through Jesus Christ, have a relationship with God we possess a Joy that is a constant – or should be.

In Psalm 27 which we heard earlier, the psalmist sings of love for the Lord and reliance upon him. The Psalm begins with "The Lord is my light and my salvation – why should I be afraid?" Light is an image of everyday life. In v 6 is written "Then I will hold my head high above my enemies who surround me . At his Tabernacle I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy." Note that the Psalmist has joy in God in spite of being surrounded by enemies and before the coming of Jesus who brings a host of extra reasons to us, in the light of the New Testament, to have joy in God.

To hold Joy in God is easy to say, yet I find it hard to hold to on a permanent basis. So today I will preach to myself on the topic of "Facing Daily Difficulties with Jesus" – this is the dominant thought. Of course I am hoping that this will help some of you in the months ahead. I'll be looking at daily difficulties encountered by Jesus not all of which we will share because each person has their own list. Then I will look at three truths about Jesus that are also truths for us which enables the power of Jesus to be with us. I ask that you let these sink from our heads to our hearts as it's there that they make the difference. For those of you facing difficulties for which there is no quick fix, like Long Covid let us go back to the last verse of Psalm 27 where it says "Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes wait patiently for the Lord." Sometimes we need to hold on to a long-term view to get us through our present troubles.

I have recently finished reading a secular book called 'Being Mortal'. The writer says this "We all require devotion to something more than ourselves for our lives to be meaningful. Without

it we have only our desires that are fleeting, capricious and insatiable, leading ultimately, only to torment." As believers in Jesus we commit to things much bigger & better than ourselves & God accompanies us.

As said earlier, the dominant thought for today is facing everyday difficulties, and I will be using the life of Jesus to teach us how to do this. As groups & individuals we all have memorable highs and lows and so did Jesus – Mount of Transfiguration/ garden of Gethsemane. In the following moment think of a terrible time and then a wonderful time in your life. There is a temptation to divide our past lives into good things for which to be grateful and bad things to forget, which means we cannot move freely into the future - but that is a topic for another sermon!

For Jesus and for us, most of life is not at these extremes. What do we call it? A constant grind? A lifelong struggle? Plodding on through endless adversity? No – they are negatives we are people who believe in Jesus so we face them with Jesus. It is important for us to choose right thoughts. Where the mind goes, the person follows. Thoughts produce attitudes and perspectives which greatly influence the overall quality of our lives. As a candle gives light to the darkness. Knowing Jesus can give light to our inner being and give us right thoughts. With right thoughts in place, we can deal with things that happen - circumstances.

I have selected three areas of everyday difficulties that Jesus faced I am calling these – frustration with disciples; people pressure; and opposition. In our reading from Matthew chapter 15 Jesus shows real frustration with disciples (Some translations say 'why don't you understand?'; others 'why are you so dull?') – In Mark chapter 10 when James & John seek

favouritism Jesus displays genuine disappointment in his reply 'You do not know what you are asking'. The truth about sacrificial love has not dropped. Again and again the disciples of Jesus fail him.

Now to people pressure. For Jesus it was enormous. In Luke chapter 8 v 19 we are told "Once when Jesus' mother & brothers came to see him, they could not get near him because of the crowds." Those verses read to us from Mark give an insight into the demands on him and how he went off to a solitary place. So although Jesus was the perfect human, even he needed to escape the massive pressures from people.

Throughout the gospels Jesus encounters opposition -particularly from the religious We heard from Scripture in Mark 11 how his authority was questioned. In Mark 2 when teachers of the religious law see him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they accuse him of eating with scum. It is very testing indeed to meet with ingratitude and opposition when we are trying to do good, but we should expect it. As believers in Jesus we are told to be salt and light – salt stings as it heals and light reveals evil so as followers we cannot expect a quiet life.

Now as Christians we believe that death is not the end and Jesus proved it. A lot of scripture tells us to 're-fix our gaze'. Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians: "For we know that when this earthly tent is taken down – when we die & leave these bodies – we will have a home in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands." Yes, we have assurance of heaven, but this life on earth really matters so I will now talk about it. We all have our Strengths & weaknesses. (Mountains/ multi tasking. Walk and talk) Not only that. We all have times when we are strong and can give to others, and other times when we are weak & broken.

However, I must recognise that good fortune (in this world) is not shared equally. For many, tragedy suddenly becomes a reality in our lives. Phil Bosman puts it this way. "The inevitable happens, you lose your job, you get sick, you have an accident, a loved one dies, ..." Perhaps one of the hardest things is when a long term illness hits us and continues for decades. I have had a taste of that since I have had insulin dependent diabetes for 40 years. These, let's call these chronic conditions. They impact not only us, but those close to us – especially husbands, wives, partners, parents, children and friends. Our faith should assist us in coping with these daily difficulties. Some seem to manage without God. But we have faith in Jesus and that can really help us keep our heads above water, and live a full life. So let us look at His example.

One. Jesus needed others and so do we. A balance here. We must not be too proud to ask for help or so eager to get others to help that we fail to take action to help ourselves. One truth that Jesus found when needing help from others was that they let Him down – and that will happen to us – just as we fail others, so they will fail us. Jesus did not let these failings destroy Him and so we must try to follow Him in that way.

Two. On account of being God's son and being sinless Jesus had a close relationship with his father. Since Jesus has taken our sin away, that close relationship with God is available to us. A poem called Whistling in the Rain puts this well. *How is it that some people sit in the sun looking like sour apples & that others whistle in the rain? How is it that there are people who, as soon as they open their eyes, see something wrong? It is because they don't understand the meaning of life, the meaning of things. They need God, not as an impersonal, hazy being somewhere far away*

but as a personal friend, like a father close to them. By being on intimate terms with God people see things with new eyes and start every morning with a new heart.

Let us now stop and think about what it means to us to be a child of God.

Three . As Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit following his baptism –so are we, once we confess our sins and believe in Jesus. In Romans Chapter 5 Paul tells us Hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our lives by the Holy Spirit who is in us and never leaves us.

For anyone not sure who is the Holy Spirit, the Bible is a story of the one creator God who comes close to a special people the Jews, then closer by coming to all in Jesus, then to those who believe God comes to be actually within us. How I need to let that truth drop and stay in my heart. In the power of the Holy Spirit we can deal with things that happen -circumstances, BUT, we can diminish that power by either quenching or grieving that 3rd person of the Trinity. This is why in the beatitudes Jesus told us "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Our hearts are not pure when we have sinful thoughts which stick to us like flies stick to fly paper so we MUST deal with them.

So, to face everyday difficulties. We need to make sure we are not alone in our trials. To know that we are children of God and be empowered by the Holy Spirit at work in us.

We shall now sing 'Father hear the prayer we offer' which is no. 518 from StF. In it there are lines like 'not for ease' and 'the steep and rugged pathway' to reflect this theme of this service.

Hymn: StF 518 – Father hear the prayer we offer

- 1. Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.**
- 2. Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.**
- 3. Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would strike the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.**
- 4. Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side.**

Love Maria Willis (1824–1908)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Generous God,
thank you for your patience when we are slow to
understand.

Thank you for your forgiveness when we make a
mistake.

Thank you for the strength to carry on when we
are exhausted.

Thank you for the joy of loving and being loved
by you.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

As we join together in our prayers of
intercession, we think about friends who are in
need of our prayer; and of 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:

We give you thanks that you have come into our
world, with all its needs and hopes.

We thank you that what you said, you did.

That the love you have for us is shown in this,
that you 'became obedient to the point of death
- even death on a cross'.

You care for the world in which we live, and long
for an end to hunger and injustice. We offer our
concerns to you and with them our desire to
share your love.

(Silence.)

**Let the same mind be in us that was in Jesus
Christ.**

You care for the people of the world who
struggle in their difficulties. For relationships that
are painful and hard, for jobs that are dreary and
dull, for problems that keep us awake at night.

Help us to understand as you do.

(Silence.)

**Let the same mind be in us that was in Jesus
Christ.**

You care for us, for our friends and families. We
thank you for them, even when they're hard
work, and pray that we can keep on loving them
as you do.

(Silence.)

**Let the same mind be in us that was in Jesus
Christ.**

You care for the Church, even when at times it
seems to be asleep, or to have lost the love that
it first had. Help us to be the Church, to be your
body, blessed, broken, and given to the world.

(Silence.)

**Let the same mind be in us that was in Jesus
Christ.**

God of word and deed, whose words brought
light and order to a world of dark and chaos, and
whose deeds spoke hope into the heart of your

people, help us who speak of our concerns,
to live our lives in love.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who 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

The Offering & 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 the wonderful "Thine be the
Glory", StF no. 313

Maybe you would like to stand and join in as we
conclude our worship together?

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 313 – Thine be the glory

**1. Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won;**

**angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes
where thy body lay:**

***Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.***

**2. Lo, Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom;
let the Church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth,
death hath lost its sting:**

***Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.***

**3. No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of Life;
life is naught without thee:
aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors
through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above:**

***Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.***

Edmond Budry (1854–1932)

translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875–1939)

Prayer & blessing

May facing our fears make us wiser.

May knowing that we need one another make us
stronger.

And may God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

bless us with courage, trust and peace of mind
as we journey through this week.

Amen.

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StF 72 – Father God I wonder

Ian Smale (*b.* 1949)

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StF 519 – Father I place into your hands

Jenny Hewer (*b.* 1945)

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NRSV & NRSVA

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