

Worship for 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to worship with the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit on this All Saints Day, when we give thanks to God for the lives and deaths of his saints: perhaps you'd like to bring to mind an individual who helped to lead you to faith in Jesus?

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our service: Malcom Aldridge for choosing the hymns, and sharing his insights in the sermon; Candy Evans and Graham Howe for the readings; and to Margaret Weir and Anne Oliver (that's me!) for the prayers.

Kate Tennyson and Tim Pearson have done the technical work putting this all together, thank you.

If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on swc.katetennyson@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

We come to the God who knows all things.
His wisdom transcends our limited understanding.

There is nothing that he has ever had to be taught.

His understanding is eternal and infinite.

This is the God whom we worship.

We want to learn from him today.

Hymn: StF 102 – For the beauty of the earth

- 1. For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:**

***Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.***

- 2. For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light:**

***Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.***

- 3. For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:**

***Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.***

- 4. For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled:**

***Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.***

- 5. For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:**

***Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.***

Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835 – 1917)

Prayer of approach

Gracious God,
as we come to you today,
we acknowledge our mixed emotions
and our differing gifts and needs.
May a desire to serve unite us.
May the truth of the gospel encourage us.
And may the example of your Son inspire us.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen

Prayer of adoration

Holy and loving God,
humbly we bow before you in worship and
praise.

May your name be exalted in the highest
heavens and in the depths of our hearts
for there is none like you.

With great power and genius you created the
universe and brought forth life.

In majesty, glory and splendour you reign,
and yet in humility and lowliness you entered
this world,

personally making your love known in Jesus,
coming amongst us to set us free from the
burdens of sin
and to invite us to dine with you at the
banqueting table of heaven.

Holy and loving God,
once again we say thank you.

Once again we adore you.

Once again we offer you our lives in worship and
service.

May your name be exalted for ever and ever

Amen

Prayer of confession

Let us confess our sins:

Approachable God:

you come to us in the weakness of Christ -
as a child upon a lap and as a man upon the
cross;
from you there is no hiding place in religious
form
or devotional exercise.

We confess to you and each other that we
embroider your purposes with our own vanities;
and place burdens of duty upon each other
which are not of your making.

Wipe from our eyes the mists of self-importance
and worth,
that we might know and enjoy the tender
strength
of your persisting purpose in the world.

Grant to us the wit that enables us to treasure
the past;
live full-heartedly in the present,
and joyfully embrace the future as your unknown
gift.

Make us to know the rising of your forgiveness
within and among us.

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 88 – Praise to the Lord the Almighty

- 1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!**
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.
- 2. Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;**
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
who with his love doth befriend thee.
- 3. Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,**
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
then to thy nee he like a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

- 4. Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.**
- 5. Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound form this people again:
gladly for aye we adore him.**

Joachim Neander (1650 – 1680)
translates by Catherine Winkworth (1827 – 1878)
and Rupert E Davies (1909 – 1994)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Joshua 3:7-17 (NRSVA)

⁷The Lord said to Joshua, ‘This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. ⁸You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, “When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.”’ ⁹Joshua then said to the Israelites, ‘Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God.’ ¹⁰Joshua said, ‘By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: ¹¹the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. ¹²So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap.’

¹⁴When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing towards the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

Gospel Matthew 23:1-12 (NRSVA)

Jesus Denounces Scribes and Pharisees

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practise what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be

humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Sermon

Matthew's Gospel Ch 23 vs. 1 -12

When we think about influential people we probably have the likes of politicians, financiers, government officials or social justice campaigners in mind. Such people have historically brought about political, economic or social change on the national or world stage. In today's world though a new term of 'influencer' has emerged. Influencers are more likely to be operating at a personal level and are often to be found somewhere on the internet.

Generally they are very well known in spheres such as films, music, radio, TV or in modern times what is known as social media. They tend to have a lot of what are called followers on internet media such as Facebook or Instagram or similar. Somehow they convince us that they know what they are talking about and that their recommendations are to be followed. They might be proposing social, political or even religious change or quite simply selling products or ideas on behalf of a business or brand. Generally they are doing this for personal gain.

But why should we care about such things when we are in the middle of our Sunday morning service of worship? Well one reason in particular is that today is the Day of Prayer for the media who can be influential upon government ministers and politicians on the big stage but also personal influencers in persuading us to modify our views, our beliefs and our lifestyle.

Coincidentally the terms 'influential and 'influencer' apply to the main characters in our this our passage this morning. The scribes and the Pharisees had become very influential people. Not only did they affect the lives of the Jewish nation as a whole with their phoney religious rules and conventions but they

hypocritically elevated themselves above the rules and the ordinary people demanding respect and recognition at the highest level; they were even able to influence the invading Roman rulers.

But Jesus himself was becoming influential in many ways too because the people began to see him as a new revolutionary leader who would change society; the religious leaders feared he would sway the people against them and expose their hypocrisy.

But he was also an influencer at a very personal level as he talked to individuals about their own conduct and lifestyle values; also about their religious beliefs and restoring their relationship with God. He was different because he served the people instead of lauding it over them; he preached humility and lived his own life in humility rather than exerting the authority given to him by God the Father. There was no thought of personal gain.

His message to the Jews was clear; the arrogant religious authorities, the Scribes and Pharisees, would be humbled in the kingdom of God but the humblest ordinary citizens or even their servants would be exalted and made first in line to join Gods Kingdom.

But what about us? Well we spend most of our lives being guided or influenced in some way or another. Most of us are influenced by our parents or guardians through childhood to our early teens.

Following on from this maybe college or university opens new horizons and then going out to work in the big wide world. Colleagues and friends may influence our outlook or we may even influence theirs. If we are lucky then we may work for someone who has an enlightened approach to life and work and they can have a big influence upon our developing character and behaviour. However we may work for someone

who is possibly an overly hard taskmaster, perhaps a bully to their subordinates or even a little dishonest in their dealings.

This latter type of life can lead us to behaving in an overbearing or bullying manner. It can make us fixated on monetary reward or purely monetary measurement of success. It can cause us either to be jealous of our associates or regard them as being of lower value or inferior to ourselves. Our families and morals take second place to work and work relationships. All the warning signs are there and we are about to become 'not very nice to know'.

I found myself being influenced in this manner having worked for a series of tough bosses some of whom were quite unscrupulous in their dealings. Eventually though I met a different sort of a boss who was quite the opposite to all the others. Indeed unless someone told you it would be hard to discover what his position was. Straightforward honesty, fairness to all employees and a disregard for wealth or personal gain were the hall marks of his character and I began to see life and work in a different light.

Yes I was now being strongly influenced in a much better way. But I also realised to my regret that I had already had my chance to change much earlier in life and whilst I had listened at the time I had not responded to this influencer. He was the only one that I needed to follow in my life – Jesus Christ!

I had of course met Jesus in my childhood at home and at Sunday School; I had met him again in my teens at church. I knew he was there when I started work and a family and I still encountered him in church. But then my so-called career took over and it was another 20 years before I came to my senses.

I realised that the same devastating message that Jesus gave to the Jews to reject self-interest

and hypocrisy and embrace humility applied to me and others like me. Jesus was proving to be the greatest influencer in my life. Jesus spread his message in person because media was non-existent but just imagine trying to spread this message in today's world. How many likes would it get on Facebook; how many times would it be retweeted on twitter. How would it go down with morning TV news teams?

Which brings me back to our day of prayer for those in media. Why do they need our prayers? I think it is because we want them to recognise and promote the idealism of Jesus. Not to go along with the popular sway; not be influenced themselves by monetary values and hard media bosses who would stop at nothing to get a good scoop. Not to sell themselves out to the highest bidder and especially not to inflict their own politics and beliefs when these are clearly self-centred.

But on a positive note we need them to learn wisdom to discern the path to justice and righteousness publishing and speaking with discretion and tolerance. Then the media would become true promoters of social justice and maybe even point the way to Jesus Christ himself.

So in summary let us consider today's passage from Matthew in the light of today. Who has most influenced our outlook on life until now? If it is not Jesus Christ then can we change our outlook so that it is from today onwards. Can we resolve to show by our actions and example to others that we are humble followers of Jesus Christ setting aside pride, envy, power, self-righteousness and self-promotion. Can we take on the cloak of genuine humility?

Dear Lord let it be!
AMEN

Hymn: StF 611 – Brother sister let me serve you

- 1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.**
- 2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.**
- 3. I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.**
- 4. I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.**
- 5. When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.**
- 6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.**

Richard A M Gillard (b1953)

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THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord our God:

on this day we thank You
for those who have run the race before us

We thank You for the saints who touched our
own lives:

parents and grandparents,

Sunday school teachers and youth leaders,
who told us the story of Your love.

Help us to fulfil our own calling today,
by inspiring and encouraging those who come
after us.

Today has been designated a day of prayer for
the media

We thank you for the media who keep us
informed.

We thank you for the technology which enables
us to keep in touch and pray together.

Guide those working in media to bring insight
and truth into our lives and to stand up for what
is good.

We pray for all those in authority and positions
of power,
that they will not always assume their way is
right
and that they may always be open to move in
new directions.

We pray for those who are facing difficult
choices about lifestyle, work or health;
may they realise that with you new directions
are possible.

We pray for all whose faith is going through
testing times,

due to sickness, pain of loss, world events,
actions of society or personal searching.

Jesus, you also went through times of testing and
trial;

be close to them that they may know
reassurance.

We pray for the wider world,
remembering that neighbours can be near or far
– wherever people cry out in need.

Now, in a moment of quietness we bring You our
personal prayers,
commending to Your love and care any who are
in our thoughts this day.

Loving God;
we remember those whom we have known,
who are no longer here beside us.
In faith we trust that they are at peace with You.

This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Let us join now in the prayer which Jesus taught us

**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,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Offering & prayer

Hymn: StF 566 – Take my life and let it be

- 1. Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.**
- 2. Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet, and let them be
swift, and beautiful for thee.**
- 3. Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.**
- 4. Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold;**

**take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose.**

- 5. Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart – it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.**
- 6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.**

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836 – 1879)

Prayer of dedication

God of all grace, we give you thanks for your
many blessings to us and we return some of
those blessings now, with our gifts of money, but
also the gifts of our lives, that you might use
them to build your Kingdom.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 479 – The King of love my shepherd is

- 1. The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.**
- 2. Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.**
- 3. Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.**
- 4. In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.**

5. **Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!**
6. **And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.**

Henry Williams Baker (1821 – 1877)

Prayer & blessing

May God give us grace to follow the saints
in humility, righteousness and peace.
And may the blessing of the God of hope,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
go with us and remain with us,
always.
Amen.

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