

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

Good morning and welcome. Although we are physically apart, once again we are able to meet together in the embrace of the Holy Spirit and we thank God for our time of fellowship.

Despite the calendar telling us it is mid-winter there are just a few minutes more daylight every day and signs of the green shoots of early bulbs showing strongly. The awesome power of our creator God is evidenced all around us as the incredible cycle of nature's renewal takes place under the dew of early evening and the cloak of early morning frosts.

Once again, we give thanks for the time and efforts of the whole team who contribute so much to ensure these services are produced every week.

To open our service this morning let us join together in singing 'Blessed Assurance' Stf.548

Hymn: StF 548 – Blessed Assurance

1. **Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine:**
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood:
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
2. **Perfect submission, perfect delight,**
visions of rapture burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love:
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.

This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.

3. **Perfect submission, all is at rest,**
I in my Saviour am happy and blest —
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love:
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.

Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship and Prayer of approach

In preparation for our service of worship this morning let us empty our hearts and minds of all thoughts and concerns that we bring with us and fill them with a desire to worship our Lord Jesus Christ both through songs of praise and prayers of thanksgiving that bring us ever closer to our saviour.

Amen

Loving Lord as we rejoice in the gift of this new day may the light of your presence set our hearts on fire with love for you now and forever.

Now let us hear some words from
 Psalm 71 verses 1 to 6.

Prayer for Lifelong Protection and Help

¹In you, O Lord, I take refuge;

let me never be put to shame.

²In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;

incline your ear to me and save me.

³Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

⁴Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the
wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

⁵For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

⁶Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's
womb.
My praise is continually of you.

Amen

Prayer of thanks and adoration

Let us remember God's presence with us now as
we pray our prayers of thanks and adoration

This morning dear Lord, we offer ourselves to
you in worship, praise and thanksgiving in
response to your incomparable love for us.

You have shown us the wonders and mysteries
of your kingdom through the life and teachings
of your son Jesus Christ. You have taught us the
true meaning and expression of love giving us a
universe bursting with life and goodness, the
wonders of which we can scarcely comprehend.
It is through your loving grace alone that we are
privileged to enjoy our lives.

We promise to be faithful to you in all that we do
in your name and hope that we can show the
fruits of your love for us so that all those we
encounter will be persuaded to share in our
faith.

Amen

Prayer of confession and declaration of
forgiveness

Heavenly Father you commanded us to love you
with all of our hearts, our minds and our
strength; and to love our neighbours as
ourselves. Lord we have often tried but failed;
sometimes we have forgotten your commands in
our haste, our anxiety, our neglect or our anger;
self-preservation or selfish desires have
overwhelmed our love for you and for others.

Restore us to loving righteousness through your
enduring love for us.

Pause to reflect.....

As we reflect upon our confession let us take
comfort that by the loving grace and mercy of
God and through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ
upon the Cross

'Our sins are forgiven'!

Our next hymn this morning reflects our prayers
reminds us of the forgiving grace of our Lord.

Hymn: StF 351 – In Christ alone

- 1. In Christ alone my hope is found,
he is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.**
- 2. In Christ alone! — who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save:
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied
for every sin on him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.**

**3. There in the ground his body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain;
then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am his and he is mine —
bought with the precious blood of Christ.**

**4. No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!**

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (NRSVA)

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

⁴Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

⁵Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'

⁶Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know
how to speak, for I am only a boy.' ⁷But the Lord
said to me,

'Do not say, "I am only a boy";
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the Lord.'

⁹Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my
mouth; and the Lord said to me,

'Now I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and over
kingdoms,

to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,

Luke 4:21-30 (NIVUK)

²¹He began by saying to them, 'Today this
scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the
gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this
Joseph's son?' they asked.

²³Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this
proverb to me: "Physician, heal yourself!" And
you will tell me, "Do here in your home town
what we have heard that you did in
Capernaum."' "

²⁴'Truly I tell you,' he continued, 'no prophet is
accepted in his home town. ²⁵I assure you that
there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's
time, when the sky was shut for three and a half
years and there was a severe famine throughout
the land. ²⁶Yet Elijah was not sent to any of
them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region
of Sidon. ²⁷And there were many in Israel with
leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not
one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the
Syrian.'

²⁸All the people in the synagogue were furious
when they heard this. ²⁹They got up, drove him
out of the town, and took him to the brow of the
hill on which the town was built, in order to
throw him off the cliff. ³⁰But he walked right
through the crowd and went on his way.

Sermon

I'm not like Jesus. I don't look like him, speak like
him, pray like him, draw crowds like him, and I
don't do many of the things he did. He looked

like a Jew with the complexion of one who spent a lot of time outdoors in a country with a lot more sun than we have. His hair and skin would have been darker than mine. He conversed in Aramaic with a Galilean accent though he also would have known classic Hebrew and probably a certain amount of Latin and Greek. He never married or had children whereas I am married and between my wife and I we have five children and seven grandchildren (plus one the way). He knew his call and destiny from birth whereas I found life changing faith in my early twenties and my calling in my late twenties though Jesus and I began itinerant ministry aged thirty. We were both about the same age when we were invited back to preach in the place of worship in our home villages, but there the similarity ends. I said nothing profound or disturbing and was well received in Weston Baptist Church and was invited to return one day. Jesus was initially well received and could have left there with a warm invitation to return but then he really upset the congregation to the point of them wanting to throw him off a cliff. When I have had negative feedback and direct criticism it was almost always over the choice of hymns and occasionally someone has questioned my interpretation of a Bible verse or phrase.

I find the order of events in Luke's Gospel interesting. He differs from the other three in many ways. He was a Gentile convert writing his account of the life and teaching of Jesus mainly for Gentile converts, though most churches would have included Jewish believers who would find links to the Law and the Prophets they knew so well. Luke chooses to include more stories about women for example than his fellow writers though it is John who emphasised Jesus human emotions and compassion in the memorable verse "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) when he stood beside Lazarus' grieving sisters. (The only other

gospel reference to Jesus weeping is in Luke who records that Jesus wept over Jerusalem Luke 19:41) So what did He say that so upset the Nazareth Jews? Was it simply "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4: 21) or was it when he went on to say that they would reject him as they had rejected the Biblical prophets before Him? Clearly it didn't help that he then praised Gentile heroes who demonstrated the spirit of the Law better than the Jews. Imagine how well it would be received if the Manchester United manager praised the skill and tactics of Manchester city players in the changing room speech. How many Christian congregations would appreciate being told that a particular Hindu man had proved to be more Christlike than they were or an Imam at Friday prayers telling his congregation that a local Christian woman exemplified the Quran better than the men in his Mosque? Not quite as controversial perhaps as Jesus identifying himself with Isaiah ('today this scripture is fulfilled') but you get my drift.

I want to bring you back to the order of events as presented by Luke. He puts the Nazareth Synagogue story as the first ministry event. (Matthew's first ministry event is the Sermon on the Mount, Mark's is an exorcism while John goes with the water into wine miracle at Cana – a hamlet close to Nazareth. Luke tells us that Jesus had already been exercising a ministry at Capernaum which has been widely talked about and would be known in Nazareth. Of course, we can only speculate as to why this story is the first. Many preachers today imply that it is because of the first part of the sermon which some describe as "Jesus' manifesto" emphasising the 'good news for the poor' quote from Isaiah. I disagree. That might be part of Luke's thinking, but I believe it's because it tells the rejection of

Jesus and His message but divine deliverance that allows him to escape with His life and limbs.

We know from the Acts of the Apostles (written by the same author) that Luke journeyed extensively with Paul through what we now call Turkey and Greece and saw first hand how Paul's preaching was at times well received by Jews in the diaspora but mostly not. It would usually be Jews directly or by stirring up civic leaders who led the persecution and rejection of Paul and the first believers. As new believers read the account of Jesus life and teaching Luke wanted them to know that they were in good company if they faced persecution and rejection, their Lord had fared no better. He also wanted them to know that the opposition by many would not prevail and that the church would not only be delivered but would grow. He wanted them to be inspired by courage of Jesus – and be assured of divine deliverance.

Our experience in Britain today is a long way removed from that of Jesus and the first generation of Christians. The opposition to our faith today is far more subtle and, as we note with the decline in church membership in western countries, is more effective. We do our best to hold the line for Jesus disappointed that often even our own children or those we nurtured in Sunday School and youth organisations do not discover the grace of God reaching out to them with the same invitation to follow. Evangelism in a largely secular and materially rich society is tough. The behaviour of religious extremists doesn't help our cause but their example is no more than a tool to undermine the integrity of faith communities. I do believe the Christian church will get through this difficult phase, it has fallen and risen before, the Wesley/Whitfield led revival reminds us what can happen when the Holy Spirit sweeps through

so we keep faithful in prayer, service and telling the Jesus story.

As we do so we must be mindful of our sisters and brothers for whom opposition to their faith is physical and very real. Because our news agenda, print and electronic, is so personality and Westminster focussed – I can't be the only one who is tired of the seemingly endless coverage of 'who did what, where, when and did they break the rules?' – that we hear little of world news. I do know that Christians in Egypt are having a tough time, the situation in Afghanistan is appalling, that problems for the church in Sri Lanka are far from over. Please pray for them and for the tiny Christian minority in Israel/Palestine. I also know that in spite of what the Humanists and Secularists in this country want to portray it is often faith based charities that are toughing it out being the hands and voice of Jesus on the margins of society here and in war torn or weather devastated countries.

So, you and I might not look and sound like Jesus of Nazareth or be able to do many of the things He did, but we still have "good news for the poor, prisoners of conscience, those who have yet to see truth and the oppressed. We can still proclaim in word and deed that 'Today, this scripture is being fulfilled'.

Hymn: StF 662 – Have you heard God's voice

- 1. Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?
*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?***

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit
down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?
*Will you walk the path that will cost you
much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*
3. In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships
start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?
*Will you walk the path that will cost you
much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*
4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of
faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of
grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?
*We will walk the path that will cost us
much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Jacqueline G. Jones

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus in times of conflict and unrest in our
own country and throughout the world we turn

to you for inspiration, encouragement and
comfort.

In the light of your love for all mankind we pray
that world leaders, governments and all in
authority will take heed of your call and seek
peaceful and positive solutions for the equal
benefit of all mankind.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayers.

Dear Lord, we give thanks for our own security,
freedom of speech and worship; we give thanks
for our own homes and peace in our nation.

We pray for all those cast adrift from their own
homes and communities by wars and conflicts,
natural disasters and outright poverty.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayers.

Heavenly Father we give thanks for the
wonderful medicines and care that we have
enjoyed in our own country in mitigation of the
effects of the Covid virus, but we remember
those who still are suffering from life changing ill
effects and the loss of loved ones.

Through your spirit of compassion Lord grant
them relief from their illness and sad losses so
that they may be restored to a happy and
healthy life.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayers.

Dear Lord, we pray for our churches that they
may thrive in spreading the good news of The
Gospel of Christ and that all divisions and
differences may be peacefully overcome so that
your kingdom here on earth will grow and
prosper to reflect the love of Jesus Christ for all
mankind

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayers.

Finally Lord we pray for ourselves, our families and friends.

Grant us peace and contentment in our lives but inspire us by renewal of our faith this day to demonstrate our love and worship of our Lord Jesus Christ and his love for us in the hope that all who live in darkness without faith will receive new life through faith in him.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayers.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Let us say together the words of the traditional Lord's Prayer.

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

Gracious Lord accept the material gifts that we give you and with them our lives to be used in the service of Jesus Christ.

Amen

Hymn: StF 446 – I will offer up my life

1. I will offer up my life

in spirit and truth,

pouring out the oil of love

as my worship to you.

**In surrender I must give my every part;
Lord, receive the sacrifice
of a broken heart.**

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
to so faithful a friend, to so loving a
King?*

*Saviour, what can be said, what can be
sung*

as a praise of your name

for the things you have done?

*O, my words could not tell, not even in
part,*

*of the debt of love that is owed by this
thankful heart.*

**2. You deserve my every breath
for you've paid the great cost;
giving up your life to death,
even death on a cross.**

**You took all my shame away,
there defeated my sin,
opened up the gates of heaven,
and have beckoned me in.**

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
to so faithful a friend, to so loving a
King?*

*Saviour, what can be said, what can be
sung*

as a praise of your name

for the things you have done?

*O, my words could not tell, not even in
part,*

*of the debt of love that is owed by this
thankful heart.*

Matt Redman (b. 1974)

THE DISMISSAL

Prayer & blessing

Let us join together now in saying the words of the grace as we bless each other.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love

**of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with us all evermore.**

Amen

And now our closing hymn No.345 StF. 'And can
it be'.

Hymn: StF 345 – And can it be

- 1. And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**
- 2. 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.**
- 3. He left his Father's throne above —
so free, so infinite his grace —
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me!**
- 4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray —
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.**
- 5. No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my
own.**

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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StF 351 – In Christ alone

Keith Getty (*b.* 1974) and Stuart Townend (*b.* 1963)

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StF 446 – I will offer up my life

Matt Redman (*b.* 1974)

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Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)

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StF 345 – And can it be

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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StF 662 – Have you heard God's voice

Jacqueline G. Jones

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NIV

[New International Version - UK \(NIVUK\)](#)

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07578 640013 or swc.katetennyson@gmail.com*