

**Worship for Sunday before Lent Racial Justice Sunday**  
**(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 our service on this St. Valentine's Day. I am Anne Oliver, your worship leader today; our Bible readings will be provided by the Rev. Jemima Strain and Rev. Richard Wilde, and Stafford Mortimer will be sharing his 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 is designated as Racial Justice Sunday, and Christians across the country are highlighting these three "R" s:

- Remembering the importance of racial justice.
- Reflecting on human diversity and thanking God for it.
- Responding by working to end injustice, racism and ignorance through prayer and action.

THE PREPARATION

*Call to worship*

People of God, raise your expectations of what it means to encounter God in this place. Be open to God revealing something of his divine nature to us, and changing the way we see the world.  
**Amen.**

*Hymn: StF 264 – Make way make way*

- 1. Make way, make way, for Christ the King in splendour arrives;**  
**fling wide your gates and welcome him into your lives.**  
  
*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),*

*for the King of kings (for the King of kings); make way (make way), make way (make way),*  
**and let his Kingdom in .**

- 2. He come the broken hearts to heal, the prisoners to free;**  
**the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance, the blind shall see.**

*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),*  
**for the King of kings (for the King of kings); make way (make way), make way (make way),**  
**and let his Kingdom in .**

- 3. And those who mourn with heavy hearts, who weep and sigh,**  
**with laughter, joy and royal crown he'll beautify.**

*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),*  
**for the King of kings (for the King of kings); make way (make way), make way (make way),**  
**and let his Kingdom in .**

- 4. We call you now to worship him as Lord of all,**  
**to have no gods before him, their thrones must fall!**

*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),*  
**for the King of kings (for the King of kings); make way (make way), make way (make way)**

**way),  
and let his Kingdom in .**

Graham Kendrick (b 1950)  
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*Prayer of approach*

The Lord, the mighty one, summons his faithful  
people to approach.

Come, let us tune into his radiance,  
allowing his light of glory to shine upon and  
within us,  
as we offer our worship and praise.  
Amen.

*Prayer of adoration*

God of divine power,  
what a spine-tingling, hair-raising event the  
disciples experienced!  
One minute they were looking upon Jesus, the  
man.  
Next, they were tuned into your glory shining in  
and through him  
as he transformed before their eyes:  
your confirmation of his deity.

**God of life-changing moments, we glorify you.**

Your same radiant light,  
available to us through relationship with Jesus  
your Son,  
transforms our hearts.

**God of life-changing moments, we glorify you.**

Your divine Holy Spirit tunes our faith in  
unexpected ways  
through the transforming radiance of your love.

**God of life-changing moments, we glorify you.**

**Amen.**

*Prayer of confession*

**Let us make our confession to God:**  
Forgive us when we lose ourselves in mystery

without living in reality;  
when we talk too much about God  
and do too little of God's work;  
when we take up time explaining  
and spend too little time doing.  
Hear our confession and turn us, O God,  
towards living the mystery,  
walking the talk, explaining through doing,  
practising loving service,  
and let the wonder reveal in people  
your glory born in us all.

**Amen.**

*Declaration of forgiveness*

Jesus' divine nature was confirmed on the  
mountain  
– he is God's beloved Son.  
He went on to suffer;  
he died and rose again for us, conquering sin and  
death.  
Now he sits at God's right hand, glorified in  
heaven  
– and thanks to him, we are completely forgiven.

**Amen.**

*Hymn: StF 272 – From heaven you came helpless  
babe*

1. **From heaven you came, helpless babe,  
entered our world, your glory veiled,  
not to be served but to serve,  
and give your life that we might live.**

***This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***

2. **There in the garden of tears  
my heavy load he chose to bear;  
his heart with sorrow was torn,  
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.**

***This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***

- 3. Come see his hands and his feet,  
the scars that speak of sacrifice,  
hands that flung stars into space  
to cruel nails surrendered.**

***This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***

- 4. So let us learn how to serve  
and in our lives enthrone him,  
each other's need to prefer,  
for it is Christ we're serving.**

***This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***

Graham Kendrick (b 1950)

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#### THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*1<sup>st</sup> Reading* 2 Kings 2:1-12 (NRSVA)

*Elijah Ascends to Heaven*

<sup>1</sup>Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup>Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.' But Elisha said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel. <sup>3</sup>The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?' And he said, 'Yes, I know; keep silent.'

<sup>4</sup>Elijah said to him, 'Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.' But he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they came to Jericho. <sup>5</sup>The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?' And he answered, 'Yes, I know; be silent.'

<sup>6</sup>Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.' But he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup>Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. <sup>8</sup>Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

<sup>9</sup>When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.' <sup>10</sup>He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.' <sup>11</sup>As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. <sup>12</sup>Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

*Gospel* Mark 9:2-9 (NRSVA)

*The Transfiguration*

<sup>2</sup>Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes

became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’ <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

#### *The Coming of Elijah*

<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

#### *Sermon*

Just recently I dusted off my two vintage LPs of the Beatles. Now I can’t get out of my head George Harrison singing *Do You Want to Know a Secret?* If you know the song, perhaps it’s now running through your mind too!

It so happens that today’s reading from St Mark’s Gospel is about a secret. In fact Mark’s whole gospel revolves round when to hide it and when to reveal it. Bible scholars call it the Messianic Secret. They point out that when the disciples of Jesus, or somebody he had healed, hailed him as the Messiah – the one chosen by God to establish his kingdom on earth – Mark says that Jesus told them to keep quiet about it.

Here’s one example. On the road with the Twelve, Jesus had wanted to know what people thought about him. The story goes on: “*He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And he*

*sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.” (Mark 8.29-30)*

Why would Jesus do that? The strange story of his Transfiguration dramatises the same trend. He takes three disciples high up a mountain, where they see him engulfed in a supernatural brilliance and talking with two long-dead founders of the Jewish religion. A divine voice comes out of the mist: “This is my Son!” At last, surely, Jesus will be outed as the Messiah! A terrified Peter bumbles on about erecting pavilions to honour the occasion.

Next moment, the dazzling light, the patriarchs, the voice, all vanish – and Christ reimposes his embargo. “*As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” (Mark 9.9)*

So that’s the reason for the secrecy! Jesus must die first. Yet it was widely believed that the Messiah would be a superhero, bringing in God’s kingdom by supernatural force. Superheroes aren’t supposed to die.

But Jesus’s mission was to reveal that God’s kingdom comes not through force but by self-sacrifice. He did not want the word Messiah bandied about until he had made that clear. “*He began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8. 31)*

Would-be disciples must tread the same path: “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (8.34)*

So the secret is what kind of Messiah Jesus must be and what kind of people we must be. Let’s

consider three things that might follow from that. First, it reveals the true nature of power. It might seem that in the world of Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un and even Donald Trump, power lies in aggression. A man named Tiberius would have agreed. He was the Roman emperor under whom Christ was crucified. As a clever general, his military conquests spread the empire across Europe.

Yet Tiberius, and his army, and his empire, were long ago consigned to the dust of history. But the crucified Christ still rules in the hearts and deeds of millions. His kind of power – service and sacrifice -- has created lasting achievements for the spiritual and material happiness of humanity.

But don't we already know this? We've heard countless sermons and sung dozens of hymns about sacrificial love. Isn't that the point – we constantly need those sermons and hymns because time and again we are pulled in the opposite direction, towards destructive selfishness.

This brings us to a second lesson we might learn. Shouldn't worship have a sharp edge that reminds us of such uncomfortable truths? We need to hear the challenges as well as the promises of the Christian faith, for example by using a broad Bible lectionary and the great milestones of the Christian year. Otherwise our services could become religious echo chambers, bouncing back to us the cosier themes of our favourite songs.

We might even ask if worship itself dominates our faith too much, at the expense of compassion and service. John Chrysostom ("golden-tongued John") was a preacher, bishop and martyr in 5<sup>th</sup> century Constantinople. For him the most sacred part of worship was the Communion wine, the blood of Christ. But he

crisply told his congregation: "If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the chalice."

In this long pandemic we have witnessed how countless people, of many faiths or none, have indeed found Christ in the neighbour next door or the stranger needing professional help.

Service is the silver thread that runs through all good relationships, not least those fired up by Valentine's Day. The partner who appreciates romantic gestures may also want help with daily tasks, or need unglamorous care in ill health or old age. There are times when Love brings a bouquet and there are times when Love brings a bucket.

Finally, let us take one more message from today's theme. We have seen, first, that Jesus's secret is the power of sacrificial love; second, that must be our priority in daily life and in worship; and now, thirdly, we must not keep this secret to ourselves. The world needs it too.

Because the Christian inspiration behind so many good things and good people often goes unrecognised. Take one example. There is concern today about famous Victorians who grew rich from owning slaves. A successful campaigner against the slave trade was William Wilberforce. His work is well known, but much less known among people in general is that this frail young man was deeply religious. He founded the Bible Society, and wanted to be a clergyman until a friend urged him to become an MP and social reformer.

Wilberforce was inspired to do his wonderful but demanding work because he knew Christ's secret of sacrificial love. Let's share that secret with others.

*Hymn: StF 260 – Swiftly pass the clouds of glory*

- 1. Swiftly pass the clouds of glory,  
heaven's voice, the dazzling light;  
Moses and Elijah vanish;  
Christ alone commands the height!  
Peter, James, and John fall silent,  
turning from the summit's rise  
downward toward the shadowed valley  
where their Lord has fixed his eyes.**
- 2. Glimpsed and gone the revelation,  
they shall gain and keep its truth,  
not by building on the mountain  
any shrine or sacred booth,  
but by following the Saviour  
through the valley to the cross  
and by testing faith's resilience  
through betrayal, pain, and loss.**
- 3. Lord, transfigure our perception  
with the purest light that shines  
and recast our life's intentions  
to the shape of your designs,  
till we seek no other glory  
than what lies past Calvary's hill  
and our living and our dying  
and our rising by your will.**

Thomas H Troeger (b 1945)

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#### THE RESPONSE

*Prayers of thanksgiving*

O God, you have always been with us.  
Thank you for the times when we have felt close  
to you.  
Thank you for guiding our steps.  
Thank you for being close even when we did not  
know it.

Thank you for the people and places that have  
helped us to draw close to you.  
Thank you for each facet of your character that  
we have glimpsed on our journey with you.  
**Amen.**

*Hymn: StF 706 – Longing for light we wait in  
darkness*

- 1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  
Long for truth, we turn to you.  
Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.**  
  
*Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*
- 2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.**  
  
*Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*
- 3. Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.**  
  
*Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*
- 4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.**

**Make us your building, sheltering others,  
walls made of living stone.**

***Christ, be our light!***

***Shine in our hearts.***

***Shine through the darkness.***

***Christ, be our light!***

***Shine in your Church gathered today.***

- 5. Many the gifts, many the people,  
many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
making your kingdom come.**

***Christ, be our light!***

***Shine in our hearts.***

***Shine through the darkness.***

***Christ, be our light!***

***Shine in your Church gathered today.***

Bernadette Farrell (b 1957)

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*Prayers of intercession*

We join together in our prayers of intercession,  
let us pray:

The heavens and the earth witness to the  
transforming power of  
God. We bring into God's presence those places  
and situations  
that we long to see changed, transformed for the  
glory of God.

We pray for countries torn apart by war,  
for refugees looking for safety,  
for those imprisoned for their faith,  
and for those who will go hungry today...

We pray for our nation,  
for those with political power,  
for those who lead our financial institutions,  
and for those who have difficult decisions to  
make in challenging times...

We pray for the poor in our community,  
for those who are unemployed or furloughed,  
for the very young and the very old,  
and for those who are alone and isolated...

We pray for those who experience  
discrimination,  
for those who challenge the persecutors;  
we remember that Jesus our Saviour faced  
injustice, for us,  
feeling the pain of those who others don't see;

We pray for those who offer support,  
key workers such as doctors, nurses, and carers,  
for those working in social services,  
in prisons, and in schools...

We pray for those who have asked for our  
prayers,  
for those who are ill or in need,  
for those we live with,  
and for those who are lost...

We pray for ourselves,  
for our own journey of discipleship,  
for courage and steadfast faith,  
as we proclaim the true power of God's 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 made 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.**

THE DISMISSAL

*Hymn: StF 55 – Immortal, invisible, God only wise*

- 1. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of  
Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we  
praise.**
- 2. Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in  
might –  
thy justice like mountains high soaring  
above  
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness  
and love.**
- 3. To all life thou givest, to both great and  
small;  
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;  
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the  
tree,  
and wither and perish; but naught changeth  
thee.**
- 4. Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,  
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their  
sight;  
all praise we would render: O help us to see  
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.**

- 5. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of  
Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we  
praise.**

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824 – 1908)

*Prayer & blessing*

Lord Jesus, raise our expectations  
of what it means to encounter God  
not just in this place but in every place;  
in all the places we shall be in the days ahead.  
Help us every day to discover something new  
about God's ways, about what God wants of us –  
and change the way we see the world,  
and the way we act.

**Amen.**

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

**Amen.**



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StF 264 – Make way make way

Graham Kendrick (b 1950)

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StF 272 – From heaven you came helpless babe

Graham Kendrick (b 1950)

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StF 260 – Swiftly pass the clouds of glory

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StF 706 – Longing for light we wait in darkness

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StF 55 – Immortal, invisible, God only wise

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824 – 1908)

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