

Worship for 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Good morning and welcome to our service this morning. My name is Malcolm Aldridge, and I am from Henley in Arden. As well as worshipping and praising our wonderful creator God we shall be listening to Russell Blackwell, our preacher for today. Russell will be talking to us about the difficulty of speaking out about someone who has power over us. Also how we as Christians are concerned to care for such people who do this so that they are loved and heard.

As ever we give thanks for the efforts of Kate Tennyson and the team who contribute so much to ensure these services are produced every week. Equally we thank all others involved who we may never see or hear but without whom something would be lacking from our worship today.

Today we are reminded of Children in Action, a Methodist Charity, which is a signpost to our themes of social justice and love. Perhaps after our service we might spend time looking at their website or just praying for their cause.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

I don't know about you but when Sunday morning arrives, I am conscious of a different atmosphere and an exciting sense of anticipation of special time to be set aside exclusively for worshipping God. So even though we are physically separated from one another let us imagine that we are stepping across the threshold of our own Church and sitting down amongst friends to prepare ourselves to meet our loving God face to face. A time to be still.

Let's empty our minds of the noise of life as it rumbles on; let us dismiss all troublesome thoughts, concerns and worries and offer ourselves unreservedly in worship and service of the Lord. Let us become aware of his presence with us, his power and his glory, his compassion and his love.

As we absorb all of this and open our hearts to the Holy Spirit let us sing our first Hymn.

Hymn: StF 20 – Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

1. **Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found —
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.**
2. **Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight —
our radiant King of light!
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.**
3. **Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;**

**he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him —
in faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.**

David J. Evans (b. 1957)

Prayer of approach

Loving God we open our hands, our hearts and our minds to your word; we ask you to cleanse our thoughts and inspire us in our worship as we absorb the power and the glory of your Holy Spirit. We offer ourselves as your loving servants ready to do your will.

Amen

Prayer of thanks and adoration

Loving Lord we are so thankful for the wondrous universe that you created for us, so finely tuned and balanced that we are able to live out our lives to the full enjoying all that you have provided for us. We recognise our fortunate position in the hierarchy of nature and our responsibilities in sharing and conserving what we have so that it may be used in equal measure for the good of our fellow mankind. We offer ourselves to you in unconditional service and with our unconditional love realising that it can never match your love for us which is beyond comparison.

Amen.

Prayer of confession

Dear Lord, you commanded that we love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, our minds and our souls and with all of our might; and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Forgive us Lord when we have not loved you as we know that we should.

Forgive us when we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; when we have failed to recognise all mankind as our neighbours and have not shared our God given good fortune in equal measure with them; when we have said the right thing and yet done the wrong thing in your eyes; when we have strayed away from the footsteps of Jesus.

Silence

Declaration of forgiveness

Now hear the words of unconditional love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..

“Your sins are forgiven”.

Our second hymn this morning reminds of the forgiving grace of our Lord.

Hymn: StF 338 – There is a Redeemer

**1. There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.**

*Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.*

**2. Jesus my Redeemer,
name above all names,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.**

*Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.*

**3. When I stand in glory
I will see his face,
and there I'll serve my King for ever
in that holy place.**

***Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.***

vv. 1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946)

v. 3 Keith Green (1953–1982)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Amos 7:7-15 (NRSVA)

⁷This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. ⁸And the Lord said to me, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A plumb-line.’ Then the Lord said,

‘See, I am setting a plumb-line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
⁹the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid
waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam
with the sword.’

Amaziah Complains to the King

¹⁰Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, ‘Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words.

¹¹For thus Amos has said,

“Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.”

¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, ‘O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.’

¹⁴Then Amos answered Amaziah, ‘I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a

herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees,
¹⁵and the Lord took me from following the flock,
and the Lord said to me, “Go, prophesy to my
people Israel.”

Psalm 24 (NRSVA)

Entrance into the Temple

¹The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;

²for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.

³Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.

⁵They will receive blessing from the Lord,
and vindication from the God of their
salvation.

⁶Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory.

Gospel Mark 6:14-29 (NRSVA)

The Death of John the Baptist

¹⁴King Herod heard of it, for Jesus’ name had become known. Some were saying, ‘John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.’

¹⁵But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.'

¹⁶But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'

¹⁷For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' ¹⁹And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²²When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' ²³And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' ²⁴She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' ²⁵Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' ²⁶The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Sermon

Speaking truth to power

Henry and Thomas were good mates. They liked doing things together and they thought alike. Thomas worked to do what suited Henry. Then one day Henry changed Thomas's job and made him Archbishop of Canterbury. Thomas became a changed man. He started to remind King Henry of some truths, which did not suit at all. Frustrated, Henry cried out: "Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?" And Thomas Becket's murder in the Cathedral followed.

But that was not the end. Henry's conscience was greatly troubled and he submitted to acts of penance.

Our Gospel reading today tells of another King, Herod, with a bad conscience. Both he and his wife Herodias had got divorces to marry. She was both his niece and his sister-in-law, which broke Jewish law. John the Baptist criticised them continually about this but Herod liked to listen to John because he knew that he was a holy man.

So when, after Herod had been manoeuvred into killing John, there were rumours that Jesus was John alive again, they touched a raw nerve.

John had indeed spoken out boldly. So much so that Herodias had persuaded Herod to put John in prison trying unsuccessfully to silence him.

John wasn't the first prophet to suffer for speaking out. Elijah and Jeremiah had hard times and our other reading told of the pressure on Amos. Here was Israelite King Jeroboam in a time that 'had never had it so good' being told by a Southerner from Judah he was not an upright man when tested by God's plumb-line. Consequently Amaziah who wielded power in the Bethel sanctuary tells this foreigner to 'Go

back to where you came from!'. But Amos is an ordinary bloke who has to speak the truth, not one of Amaziah's professional prophets. Perhaps there is a lesson for us today about listening to foreign views. I wonder where our 'leaning walls' are? You cannot argue with a plumb-line.

Amos, the other prophets and John the Baptist were in that sense forerunners for the experience of Jesus. He came to testify to the truth but those in power did not find it easy. Pilate pointed out that he had the power to free or crucify, yet he had difficulty in hearing what truth was.

Herodias in particular seems to have been a ruthless person. She so nursed this grudge against John that she would stop at nothing, including using her daughter.

Consider for a moment the daughter, known as Salome. Was she not an abused young woman? Did the girl really want to dance provocatively in front of a roomful of drunken men? Who insisted? Then when tipsy Herod offered anything she wanted up to half his kingdom, she was frightened to choose until told what she had to say.

Salome was the subject of the abuse of domestic power and she was afraid to speak for herself.

Domestic abuse is still prevalent today. We know that it has increased by 40% in the West Midlands in the last year, probably because of lock-downs. It has spiked during the Euro football. And sadly it exists in church families too, where controlling powers are misused and people are afraid to speak out.

This year's Methodist Conference considered a paper on 'The Theology of Safeguarding', which includes domestic abuse of all kinds and there will be new guidance and policy early in 2022.

We should safeguard children and vulnerable people first and foremost because it begins with God's love and protection and desire for fullness of life for all, and not rely on legislation or liabilities to be the main incentive. Yet the paper reminds us we fail to challenge inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour. We can do more to empower and hear the voices of those who have suffered discrimination by those in powerful positions.

The latest Summer edition of the magazine Connexion encourages us to 'Be Bold' to speak out for ourselves or on behalf of others. Thus in the words of the Methodist Church's statement of safeguarding principles, we will seek to challenge any abuse of power, especially by anyone in a position of trust. We avoid the danger of self-righteousness by speaking with humility and love. Let our words be proportionate and our motives sincere as we speak truth to power. And let's listen to others.

I know this is a very sensitive subject, with deep hurts. If you are concerned about anything I am speaking about, don't hesitate to tell any of the pastoral staff or a safeguarding officer. You can find their contact details on church notice boards or on the staff and safeguarding pages of the South Warwickshire website.

In all this we are not alone. Jesus walked before us this path of telling truth to power and his peace is with us now.

Jan Berry sums it up for me in the words of this hymn [StF 183]:

*Praise to the God who comes to judge
the truth of word and deed,
who calls our minds and wills to change,
rebuking wealth and greed.*

*Praise to the God who clears the way,
preparing room and space;
for power and pride will lose their sway
as peace comes in their place.*

Amen

Singing the Faith 319

Christ Triumphant – word incarnate, truth revealing; suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated.

Hymn: StF 319 – Christ Triumphant ever reigning

- 1. Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
hear us as we sing:**

***Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!***

- 2. Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
by your humble birth:**

***Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!***

- 3. Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,
victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
sinners justified:**

***Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!***

- 4. Priestly king, enthroned for ever
high in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
stifle hymns of love:**

***Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!***

- 5. So, our hearts and voices raising
through the ages long,**

**ceaselessly upon you gazing,
this shall be our song:**

***Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!***

Michael Saward (b. 1932)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

We bring before you now Lord all those who are suffering from abuse or neglect whether it be mental or physical in nature; whether it be obvious or by implication; whether it be by subtle pressure or outright demand; whether it be accepted as inescapable ordinary life with seemingly no alternative or whether it be unbearable any longer.

Lord of suffering and love bring comfort and hope to all such souls that they may feel the warmth of your love; wrap them in the protective cloak of your Holy Spirit bringing relief from their torture; lift them Lord from their downcast state.

Lord of courage and perseverance lead them along the path of salvation from their troubles so that they may be unafraid to seek help and bold enough to speak out in truth against their oppressors.

Lord of justice and peace grant them protection from all repercussions and a new life full of your light and love.

Lord of our lives inspire us to show true love and fellowship by seeking out such sufferers to ensure that they may be supported through their troubles by our love and understanding and grant us courage and discernment to speak out and act on their behalf where appropriate without fear or hesitation.

Lord in your mercy.....

Hear our prayers.

We pray for all nations and their rulers.....
Dear Lord grant love, wisdom and generosity of spirit to all leaders, governments and authorities that they may nurture the natural resources that you have given us; respect all other nations and peoples as equal to their own in all respects and share their nation's wealth and resource for the benefit of all mankind. Help them to understand that love and care will always triumph over aggression and greed.

Lord in your mercy.....

Hear our prayers.

We think of those all over the world suffering from the effects of war and extreme nationalism; those suffering from poverty, malnutrition and medical neglect; those born into suffering who have never known anything else. May they gain relief Lord through your grace and support.

We pray for ourselves, our neighbours, friends, relatives and fellow Christians as we and they face up to difficult or daunting challenges in life. May the light of your love shine upon us all.
Lord in your mercy.....

Hear our prayers.

In all that we ask may we serve you Lord to the best of our abilities and be inspired by the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in all that we do.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Let us say together the words of the 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 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)

THE DISMISSAL

Prayer & blessing

Let us join together now in saying the words of
the grace.

**‘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.

Hymn: StF 470 – Lord for the years your love has
kept and guided

- 1. Lord, for the years your love has kept and
guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our
way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and
provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks
today.**
- 2. Lord, for that word, the Word of life which
fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls
ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires
us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's
praise.**
- 3. Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and
care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and
nation,**

**Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our
prayer.**

- 4. Lord, for our world; when we disown and
doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without
him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may
reign.**
- 5. Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake
us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.**

Timothy Dudley-Smith (*b.* 1926)

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StF 183 (extract) Praise to the God who clears the way

Jan Berry (*b.* 1953)

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Hymn: StF 319 – Christ Triumphant ever reigning

Michael Saward (*b.* 1932)

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Hymn: StF 470 – Lord for the years your love has kept and guided

Timothy Dudley-Smith (*b.* 1926)

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Hymn: StF 20 – Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

David J. Evans (*b.* 1957)

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

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836–1879)

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Hymn: StF 338 – There is a Redeemer

v. 1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946) v. 3 Keith Green (1953–1982)

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