

**Worship for 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

We are pleased to welcome you as you join us for worship. I am Margaret Weir, and I am your Worship Leader today. Members from Wellesbourne and Warwick churches are providing our readings and Nigel Saxton will share his message. We give thanks for the technical skills of those who create a whole act of worship from all the parts.

This time of year is a time of new beginnings – children have returned to school and we have begun a new Methodist Year. We go forward in expectation and hope.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Welcoming God, you invite us
to worship you and to be together.
Sustain us with your presence,
nourish us with your word,
strengthen us in your service
and send us out to live
every day of our lives, in your name.

Amen.

Hymn: StF28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

- 1. Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.**
- 2. Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,**

**sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.**

**Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.**

- 3. Jesus calls us to each other,
vastly different though we are;
creed and colour, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.**

- 4. Jesus calls us to his table
rooted firm in time and space,
where the Church in earth and heaven
finds a common meeting place.
Share the bread and wine, his body;
share the love of which we sing;
share the feast for saints and sinners
hosted by our Lord and King.**

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

Opening Prayer

Father God,
Most merciful and gracious
we offer you our heartfelt love and praise
because your Son, Jesus Christ,
was willing to risk everything for the whole
world.

Even for us.

Amen

Forgiving God,
You have asked us to bear fruit in our lives
and to share our faith with others.

Yet so many times we have failed You in doing
this.

We have let You down and let ourselves down.
Our thoughts and words have failed You;
we have missed opportunities to speak up for
our belief in You,
choosing to remain silent instead of witnessing
for You.

Our discipleship has been weak and often non-
existent.

We are ashamed of our weaknesses, faults,
greed, selfishness, envy, and pride.

Our faith has been shallow, and we have failed
You in so many ways

In Your forgiving mercy and grace
cleanse our hearts and minds that we may better
serve You
and so that we can feel strengthened to follow
You more faithfully each day.

Amen

Declaration of Forgiveness

There is good news for all who put their trust in
Christ.

Jesus says: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

The Lord's Prayer

We continue in our prayers with the prayer
which Jesus taught his disciples.

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

Hymn: StF 161 – Speak O Lord

- 1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.**
- 2. Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.**
- 3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for
us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.**

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

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Proverbs 1:20-33 (NRSVA)

The Call of Wisdom

²⁰ Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.
²¹ At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
²² 'How long, O simple ones, will you love being
simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
²³ Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.
²⁴ Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one
heeded,
²⁵ and because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
²⁷ when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not
answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not find
me.
²⁹ Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the Lord,
³⁰ would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,
³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.
³² For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
³³ but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of
disaster.'

Psalms 19 (NRSVA)

God's Glory in Creation and the Law

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his
wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hidden from its heat.

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹ the fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.
¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
¹² But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.
¹³ Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation
of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

James 3:1-12 (NRSVA)

Taming the Tongue

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my
brothers and sisters, for you know that we who
teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For
all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who
makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to
keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³ If
we put bits into the mouths of horses to make
them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴ Or
look at ships: though they are so large that it
takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are
guided by a very small rudder wherever the will
of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small
member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶
And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed
among our members as a world of iniquity; it
stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of
nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every
species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea
creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by
the human species, ⁸ but no one can tame the
tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹
With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it
we curse those who are made in the likeness of
God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and
cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not
to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the
same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹²
Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield
olives, or a grapevine yield figs? No more can salt
water yield fresh.

Mark 8:27-38 (NRSVA)

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages
of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his
disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' ²⁸ And
they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and
others, Elijah; and still others, one of the
prophets.' ²⁹ He asked them, 'But who do you say
that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the
Messiah.' ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to
tell anyone about him.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³¹ Then 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. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter
took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But
turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked
Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you
are setting your mind not on divine things but on
human things.'

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said
to them, 'If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross
and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save
their life will lose it, and those who lose their life
for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will
save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the
whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed,
what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸
Those who are ashamed of me and of my words
in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them
the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he
comes in the glory of his Father with the holy
angels.'

Sermon

Proverbs 1 v 20 – 33; Psalm 19; James 3 v 1-12; Mark 8 v 27 -38

Morning to you all. Our readings for today contain much about words – both spoken and written. These set lectionary readings tempted me to give them the body swerve – particularly the one from James where it gives warnings to teachers in the church! Human teachers **are** part of God's design for his people, but it is the words of the bible that really count, which is why my dominant thought for today is 'The word of God bring fullness of life.' In using the word 'life' I will be considering both the current reality of our present world that we can see, AND that of the unseen world that follows death. As part of the Local Preachers training course both benefits and disadvantages of following the lectionary are covered. If God calls a preacher to teach on a Holy Spirit inspired subject – it may not fit with the readings for the day she or he preaches. Yet by following the lectionary the danger to a preacher of continually sticking only to their favourite themes is avoided. Now I will stop talking **about** the bible and **get into it**, starting with Proverbs.

Proverbs is an unusual book in that it tells us at the start why it was written. The prologue tells us that learning from Proverbs will lead us into wisdom. One of the key themes of the Old Testament is that of 'Fear of the Lord brings wisdom' with the thrust being that things will go well in life for those who pay attention and are obedient to obeying the commands of God and therefore pleasing him. In our reading from Proverbs the words of wisdom given by God to keep his people on a path to fulfilled and productive lives are being ignored and the consequential 'download' into chaos and disaster to those responsible are described in vivid terms.

Nothing could be clearer than the following verses. "I called you so often but you wouldn't come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention. So when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster engulfs you like a cyclone and anguish and distress overwhelm you I will not answer you."

What a different scene there is in Psalm 19. We are told in verse 1 'The heavens proclaim the glory of God whilst verses 8 – 11. say "The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair. They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb." The psalmist is taking delight in God and his laws, so these verses are the exact opposite to the mockers and scoffers listed in our Proverbs reading. This attitude to the commands of God is on a level up from merely being obedient.

Going back to mockers and scoffers – there are large numbers in the UK who are in that position. There is a superficial certainty about the non – existence of God which is considered nowadays to be cool. God has standards and values and God-denial gives a perfect get out for ignoring them. The psalmist in Psalm 19 uses the term 'Lord' which has a greater sense of relationship than the more general term of 'God'. As believers after the time of Jesus that is our position and even more so. We can join the psalmist and praise God for the perfect revelation of his will with its true statutes and enlightening commands.

Now to our reading from James which is well known and majors on the spoken word coming from our tongues. Back to our dominant thought

of 'The word of God brings fullness of life.' Whether we have fullness of life on account of Jesus will show by our words. Why? Because our words give evidence of changed hearts. If our speech involves putting others down, grumbling, lying, cursing and swearing it shows our claim to being transformed by Jesus is not ringing true. As James says it is like bitter and sweet water coming from the same fountain. If our speech gives praise, brings truth, shows wisdom and imparts encouragement these things are the fruit of pure hearts. Jesus said that we shall be judged for every careless word, so it is not prepared speech that reveals us when we are thinking carefully about what to say, but the **words we say when we are angry, tired, stressed and busy that reveal our hearts.** I don't know about you, but I find that really scary. To our list of the products of a changed heart I would like to add laughter of a clean and healthy kind as *sometimes* Christians are seen as so deadly serious that to laugh is seen almost as a sin. There is a saying "A day without laughter is a day wasted", and another is "If you can't laugh, you can't live." The great preacher George Buttrick wrote "The coronation of Jesus in the believer's heart will take place among confession, tears and much laughter"

Our gospel reading takes us to a very different place from laughter. In it Jesus asks disciples who they think he is. When Peter gives the inspired truth, this revelation is followed by predictions from Jesus as to the outworking of his destiny which are unexpected and unwelcome. Jesus then gives sobering expectations for his followers. You will remember by now that regarding the dominant thought for today 'The word of God bring fullness of life'. I promised to refer to its relevance to this present life and whatever awaits us Well here we see a shift in that being obedient to God and keeping to his

commands **may well cost us dearly in this present life, yet bring great rewards in the next.**

This truth is summarised by Jesus as he says "What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul?"

This applies with particular clarity to persecuted believers **but also to us.** The Christian life can be hard. We are different from the majority and must not be afraid to be that way, which is why Jesus says towards the end of our gospel reading "If you try to hang on to your life you will lose it, but if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News you will save it". This message does not sit well with us in the prosperous west. We can find it hard living for God in a hostile world. We can find it hard being tempted. It's hard when people seem to be getting on perfectly well without God – so maybe we need to redefine 'Getting on well'. What have we in common with the Jesus in terms of owning possessions? Jesus owned no more than the clothes on his back. To be fair this is easier in a warm dry country. In the Sci-Fi book called 'End of Eternity', people can visit alternative realities. They can back go to different parts of the world in different times in history. On that theme what if Jesus had lived at Latitude 54 – that's the middle of the UK – with its cold wet winters instead of Jerusalem at Latitude 31 which is well south of Sicily?

Life is not simple is it? I must not condemn wealth outright. By having wealth and possessions we can help others. It means we do not need to spend all our lives earning enough just to feed and house ourselves. That teaching by Jesus on the sheep and the goats finds its mark on those who have both the means and the time to help others. Crime is easier to avoid if you do not need to steal to eat so as to stay alive. But here I am concentrating far too much

on what we can see and touch. We know that there is more to life than we can see and touch. Let's try and look at our lives God's way? God is raising us up as his children and he wants us to be the best. He allows us to go through tough experiences to get us spiritually fit and strong. It's a sign that he cares deeply about us and he wants us to be holy. Like him. You hopefully have remembered by now my topic for today which is 'The words of God bring fullness of life.' John Wesley wrote magnificent words about this and here they are.

"I am a creature of the day. I am as spirit come from God and returning to God. I want to know one thing, the way to heaven. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. He has written it down in a book. At any price give me that book. Let me be a man of one book. "

That book is the Bible. As Methodists both the Wesley brothers carry significance for us and Charles wrote the marvellous hymn beginning with the words "And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood." In verse 5 of this hymn it says, 'bold I approach the eternal throne'. The eternal throne is heaven. What is heaven like? Is it a place of gloom and despair? Absolutely not. It is like a perfect Jerusalem – brimming over with life, justice and joy. Through Christ we all have the chance not to miss that amazing offer.

Let's finish the sermon by singing together that great hymn to which I have just referred, it is number 345 in StF. Bless you all.

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)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Loving God,

we thank You for Your constant guidance in our lives

and for all the ways You encourage, challenge, strengthen and renew us.

We thank You that we still hear Your quiet words whispering to us in the silence of our own hearts.

We thank You that through song, prayer,
preaching, worship mission and service,
we are still able to hear Your voice.
Through fellowship and community,
we can feel Your presence in what we do and
say..

We thank You that through Christ's life,
work, teaching, death and resurrection
You speak to us
and that Your Holy Spirit inspires, comforts and
empowers us each day.

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God
we pray for those who struggle against You in
thought word and deed.
We pray for those who knowingly flout Your will
and exploit others for their own gain.

We pray for those who put their trust and faith
in false gods,
who know there is something missing in their
lives
but deny that it is You –
instead seeking refuge in money, possessions,
and success.

We pray for our world that is broken and in pain.
For those who are in sorrow and need.
For the hungry, poor, and lonely.
For the sick and bereaved.
Be their rock and constant companion through
difficult and dark days.

Draw near to all and grant the peace of Your
presence,
the healing of Your touch and Your guidance
and assurance of love
so that all who are weak and weary
may walk in hope and faith.

Amen

The Offering & prayer

Generous God

We have received so much from you,
Accept our gifts, as a token of our love for you,
And our desire for justice and peace in the world.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 94 – To God be the Glory

- 1. To God be the glory, great things he has done!**
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in:
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
and give him the glory — great things he has done!
- 2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,**
to every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
and give him the glory — great things he has done!
- 3. Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,**
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we

see:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

***O come to the Father, through Jesus the
Son;***

***and give him the glory — great things he
has done!***

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

Prayer & blessing

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us
all evermore
Amen**

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StF28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

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Hymn: StF 161 – Speak O Lord

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

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StF 345 – And can it be

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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StF 94 – To God be the Glory

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

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NRSV & NRSVA

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