

CALL TO WORSHIP

`In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring' (Romans 9: 8).

WHO YOU SAY I AM

https://youtu.be/lcC1Bp13n_4

Who am I that the highest King would welcome me?

I was lost, but He brought me in
Oh His love for me
Oh His love for me

Who the Son sets free
Oh, is free indeed
I'm a child of God, yes, I am

Free at last, He has ransomed me
His grace runs deep
While I was a slave to sin, Jesus died for me
Yes, He died for me

Who the Son sets free
Oh is free indeed
I'm a child of God, yes, I am
In my Father's house
There's a place for me
I'm a child of God, yes, I am

I am chosen, not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me
I am who You say I am

I am chosen, not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me
I am who You say I am
I am who You say I am

Who the Son sets free
Oh is free indeed
I'm a child of God, yes, I am
In my Father's house
There's a place for me
I'm a child of God, yes, I am

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I am who You say I am

I am chosen, not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me
I am who You say I am
Oh I am who You say I am
Yes, I am who you say I am

Who the Son sets free
Oh is free indeed
I'm a child of God, yes, I am
In my Father's house
There's a place for me
I'm a child of God, yes, I am

OPENING PRAYER

Faithful one, whose word is life, come with saving power to free our praise, inspire our prayer and shape our lives for the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

CONFESSION

Compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God, though we have rebelled against him. Let us then renounce our wilfulness and seek his mercy by confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Gracious God, we have come to see that our lives fall far short of your glory.

Have mercy and forgive us.

You have given your Son for us, and poured out your Spirit, yet we fail to return your love with all our heart.

Have mercy and change us.

Too often we are selfish and proud, ignoring you and neglecting others.

Have mercy and cleanse us.

When we do not truly trust and obey you, we are overwhelmed by self-pity, fear and worry.

Have mercy and deliver us.

In Christ we are given a sure hope and secure love, yet we follow the false hopes and desires of this world.

Have mercy and renew us.

Father, through the redeeming death of your Son, by your Spirit, and through your word, enable us to follow you with joy.

All this we ask, confident of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

Our God fulfils his promises and is true to his word. We have confessed our sins. God has forgiven us, because Christ died for us.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Gracious God accept these gifts, and with them our lives, to be used in your service, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

READING: John 1: 9 - 13

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RUN TO THE FATHER

https://youtu.be/OaCFAcV_2LE

**I've carried a burden
For too long on my own
I wasn't created
To bear it alone
I hear Your invitation**

**To let it all go
Yeah, I see it now
I'm laying it down
And I know that I need You**

**I run to the Father
I fall into grace
I'm done with the hiding
No reason to wait
My heart needs a surgeon
My soul needs a friend
So I'll run to the Father
Again and again
And again and again
Oh-oh, oh-oh, oh-oh**

**You saw my condition
Had a plan from the start
Your Son for redemption
The price for my heart
And I don't have a context
For that kind of love
I don't understand
I can't comprehend
All I know is I need You**

**I run to the Father
I fall into grace
I'm done with the hiding
No reason to wait
My heart needs a surgeon
My soul needs a friend
So I'll run to the Father
Again and again
And again and again**

**Oh-oh, oh-oh, again and again
And again and again
Oh-oh, oh-oh (oh-oh)**

**My heart has been in Your sights
Long before my first breath
Running into Your arms
Is running to life from death
And I feel this rush deep in my chest
Your mercy is calling out
Just as I am You pull me in
And I know I need You now**

I run to the Father
I fall into grace
I'm done with the hiding
No reason to wait
My heart needs a surgeon
My soul needs a friend
So I'll run to the Father
Again and again

I run to the Father
I fall into grace
I'm done with the hiding
No reason to wait
And my heart found a surgeon
My soul found a friend
So I'll run to the Father
Again and again
And again and again

Oh-oh, oh-oh, again and again
And again and again
Oh-oh, oh-oh, oh-oh
Again and again

REFLECTION

A FRESH START (3) Children of God

There was a film that came out a few years ago, 'The Bourne Identity' in which the main character, Jason Bourne, is suffering from extreme memory loss. In the film he wakes adrift on the Mediterranean Sea not knowing who he is, and so begins a journey to discover his identity. However, the CIA are trying to capture him before he discovers who he is. And so Jason Bourne wonders, "Who am I?" We can question our identity especially at difficult times in our lives, for example when we are made redundant or retire or are divorced or lose our health or a loved one, or any other major event that rocks our world. I would say that a global pandemic fits the bill here and for some covid will cause them to wonder 'Who am I? What is life for? Where do I go from here?'

For me in this last week the major event that has rocked my world has been the death of my wonderful mum. Only five weeks ago she was full

of life and hope. Fortunately I and my brothers and sister were able to be by her side until the end, a precious gift considering many have died alone this past year without being able to have family beside them. When a major tragedy or event shakes our world this can leave us struggling with a sense of identity. Who am I? What is life for? Where do I go from here?

This passage in the opening chapter of John's gospel is all about identity. The Jews were very confident of their identity as God's chosen people. These were the people whom God had rescued out of Egypt, whom God had guided and revealed himself to in the desert, the people to whom God gave the Law and the Prophets, the holy scriptures, and the people he'd prepared for the coming of his Son, the Messiah. And so Jesus was born into a land which was known as God's land and to a people who were known as God's people. So he ought to have been welcomed with open arms; he should have been welcomed as their king, as the Magi in Matthew's gospel proclaim. Yet John tells us 'they did not recognise him' (v10) nor 'receive him' (v11).

Mind you, it's not just the Jews who didn't recognise nor receive him. We cannot point the finger of judgement at the Jews of Jesus' day. We in Britain have enjoyed the gospel of Christ for centuries; it has shaped our laws, our institutions, our life, our culture; we have prided ourselves on all these things. Yet now the country which sent so many missionaries across the world in the past has in many ways now turned its back on Jesus. It sneers at the thought that Jesus might have something to say to people today, and treats Jesus as either someone who never existed or if he did exist he simply came for those who were religious. That is the attitude of many, probably the majority of Britons today.

However, in terms of identity, one thing I do hear many say is that we are all God's children. There is a truth in that, although I would say that scripture declares that we are all made in God's image (Genesis 1:27) which is different from saying we are God's children. There is a sense in

which every person has to become a child of God; we are not naturally God's children. All people are God's children in the sense that we are all created by God, but only some are God's children in the sense of a depth of relationship, like that of a child and parent.

Imagine a parent has two children. The parent does everything for them both. One only ever takes and never gives, believing he deserves all the parent does for him. When he leaves home he rarely keeps in touch, except when he needs something. The relationship is at best distant. This contrasts with the second child, raised in the same home with the same love and opportunities. He realises all the parent has sacrificed for him and shows his gratitude. Over time he grows closer and closer to the parent, and even when he leaves home the depth of love and friendship is still there. Both these two children are children of the same parent, but the depth of relationship is different. The second is a child in a way the first never was. The latter is what it means to be God's child.

Jesus spoke about us being God's children when he spoke to Nicodemus (John 3) where he mentioned being born again / born from above (John 3:3, 7) or born of the Spirit (John 3:8) or born of God (1 John 5:1). How are we born of God? `Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God' (v12). That means we are not children of God by nature. We become God's child through faith in Jesus.

Belief in Jesus' name is a very Jewish way of speaking and thinking. By using the name of someone it wasn't simply what a person was called. It was more about their character, their nature. It means that those who know God's character and his nature, will trust him for everything, just like a new-born baby trusts its mother for everything. Our identity is as God's children through faith in Christ. The human side of this relationship is that we have to make what God offers our own through faith. I may as a father offer my love and advice to my children.

They may choose to accept that love or reject it and walk away. It's the same with God. God offers us the right to become his children but we have to accept it to change our relationship with him, and he doesn't force us to accept him.

Gabriel Sharma was raised a Hindu. One day he calculated that the amount of cycles of birth and re-birth needed meant that he would never get to know God. In the end he discovered the Christian faith after meeting Ana, who he married in 1985; he found that he could know God now. And so he became a Christian. In 2005 Gabriel Sharma was installed as the first Indo-Fijian Archbishop of Fiji. Through faith he had become God's child and sought to serve him for evermore.

`Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God' (v12). What a privilege! What an honour, to be called God's child. And that is what we are, born of God. If you have ever wondered who you are, if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you are a child of the living God.

What does that mean for us today? It means we should value others because God values them. It means our worth is not dependent on age, ability, intellect, or anything else. Our worth is as God's children.

In terms of identity, we are all too often valued for the job we do, the status we have or the money we earn, but our true worth is based on our relationship with God in Jesus. I recently read about a woman who had chosen to stay at home and look after her children. She was in a position to do this, but many friends were critical. Even though she could work, she had chosen to become `a housewife,' a term which is so often derided in society today. What this attitude reveals is that our society values people for what they do and what they earn rather than for who they are. In other words we only have value if we are economic contributors; the more we earn the more valuable we are. What does this say to those who have no work, those who cannot work,

those who have profound disability, those who are elderly and retired, and those who choose to stay at home and look after their children?

However, this passage here in John 1 says we are valued by God regardless of all these other things. What greater security, status and value can there be than being a child of God. That is our identity.

I dedicate these words to the glory of God and the memory of my mum who saw the value in all people, who lived a life of love and kindness and grace.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

These are responsive prayers in response to the words **Father hear our prayer...**

Please respond with,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord we thank you for the privilege you have given us to be able to pray for others. We know the power of prayer in our own lives and we give you thanks for past answered prayers. We focus now on others.

We lift before you our neighbourhood for the work of Connecting Bowthorpe, for the Cloth of Kindness, for all initiatives that share your saving message and bounty in our community.

Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We pray our NHS service beleaguered by the numbers infected with Covid and needing hospitalisation while also trying to vaccinate the vulnerable and key workers. We pray for an end to the pandemic, through vaccination and by not mixing with others as hard as that is to do.

Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We pray for our children and their teachers. That until it is safe to fully have face to face teaching again that through technology learning, education and opportunities will not be lost.

Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We pray for the hurting the lost and the sick. Send them your comfort, peace. For those who have lost hope rekindle those embers within them, fan them back into flame. Send protection for the powerless

and hold them close to your heart. Especially those who suffer because they follow you.

Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord we pray for the leaders of our nation that at such a difficult time they are surrounded by Godly councillors so that they make decisions of integrity, justice, fairness and morality.

Father hear our prayer,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord wrap Mark and all his family in your arms may they know your peace and comfort as they grieve the loss of Mark's mother. All these things we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.**

**Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
yours now and for ever. Amen.**

I AM A CHILD OF GOD

<https://youtu.be/f8TkUMJtK5k>

**You unravel me
With a melody
You surround me with a song
Of deliverance
From my enemies
'Til all my fears are gone**

**I'm no longer a slave to fear
I am a child of God
I'm no longer a slave to fear
I am a child of God**

**From my mother's womb
You have chosen me
Love has called my name**

I've been born again
Into Your family
Your blood flows through my veins

I'm no longer a slave to fear
I am a child of God
I'm no longer a slave to fear

I am a child of God

I'm no longer a slave to fear
I am a child of God
I'm no longer a slave to fear

I am a child of God

I am surrounded
By the arms of the Father

I am surrounded
By songs of deliverance

We've been be liberated
From our bondage

We're the sons and the daughters
Let us sing our freedom

Ooh, ooh
Ooh, ooh

Ooh, ooh
Ooh, ooh

You split the sea
So I could walk right through it
My fears are drowned in perfect love
You rescued me
So I could stand and say
I am a child of God

You split the sea
So I could walk right through it
My fears are drowned in perfect love
You rescued me
So I could stand and say
I am a child of God
I am a child of God

Yes, I am a child of God

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Lord Jesus Christ,
send us out with confidence in your word,
to tell the world of your saving acts,
and bring glory to your name. **Amen.**

May the God who gives us peace make us holy in every way and keep our whole being, spirit, body and soul, free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

And I'll leave you with one last song. One that reminds us that not all God's children share in the freedoms we enjoy or take for granted; even if we are forgoing those freedoms, for short while, for the greater good of our community, our nation, for humanity. Some of God's creation are bought and sold like they are just another commodity rather than God's children. And as those who have been following The Archers, on radio 4, modern slavery may not be that far away and is easily hidden. Imagine not being able to go where and when you want to, but without any end in sight. This is the song https://youtu.be/llp2Pw_mpSM