

WELCOME AND NOTICES

Church meeting taking place at 11.30am today via Zoom.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84035916878?pwd=NGdEcTVUYXIDbHY2UUZXNW1zbGIldz09>

Meeting ID: 840 3591 6878

Passcode: 877794

CALL TO WORSHIP

‘Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! (Isaiah 64:1)

SONG: THE KING OF LOVE

<https://youtu.be/AhPVFm9hUrQ>

The King of love is my delight,
His eyes are fire, His face is light,
The First and Last, the Living One,
His name is Jesus.

And from His mouth there comes a sound
That shakes the earth and splits the
ground,
And yet this voice is life to me,
The voice of Jesus.

*And I will sing my songs of love,
Calling out across the earth;
The King has come,
The King of love has come.
And troubled minds can know His peace,
captive hearts can be released;
The King has come,
The King of love has come.*

My Lover’s breath is sweetest wine,
I am His prize, and He is mine;
How can a sinner know such joy?
Because of Jesus.

The wounds of love are in His hands,
The price is paid for sinful man;
Accepted child, forgiven son,
Because of Jesus.

And I will sing my songs of love...

And my desire is to have You near;
Lord, You know that You are welcome
here.

Before such love, before such grace
I will let the walls come down.

OPENING PRAYER AND CONFESSION

Lord God, you who dwell in unapproachable light, we praise and worship you, for you have come down in the person of your Son Jesus Christ and in the power of your Holy Spirit. You are the God who makes himself known and opens the way of salvation.

Lord God, we confess our sins to you in order that nothing would stand between us. We confess that at times we have forgotten your great love for us and lived as though you were not in our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess that we have failed to act with compassion, preferring to live for ourselves and not for you.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess that we have not lived according to your Word but lived according to the ways of the world.

Lord, have mercy.

We ask to be forgiven. By the power of your Spirit turn us from evil to good, help us to forgive ourselves and to forgive others, and keep us in your ways of righteousness and love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. To all who turn to him he says ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ He also says, ‘Follow me.’ Let us receive his forgiveness and answer his call for his glory’s sake.
Amen.

OFFERTORY

**Generous Lord, we bring to you our gifts,
our prayers, ourselves. Take all we have
and all we are and use it all for your glory's
sake. Amen.**

SONG: WHO AM I (Casting Crowns)

<https://youtu.be/C53GgUJ6y-Y>

Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt
Who am I, that the Bright and Morning
Star

Would choose to light the way
For my ever wandering heart

Not because of who I am
But because of what You've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who You are

I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean (ocean)
A vapor in the wind
Still You hear me when I'm calling
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling
And You've told me who I am...
I am Yours, I am Yours

Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin
Would look on me with love and watch
me rise again
Who am I, that the voice that calmed the
sea

Would call out through the rain
And calm the storm in me

Not because of who I am
But because of what You've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who You are

I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean (ocean)
A vapor in the wind
Still You hear me when I'm calling
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling

And You've told me who I am (I am)
I am Yours...

PRAYER

As we come before your Word today, here
the cries of our hearts and the yearnings
within us. We want to know you more and
walk in your ways. Lord, would you open
the heavens today by your Spirit, and
speak your word of life that we may live
to the glory of your holy name. **Amen.**

READING: Mark 1:9-13

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth
in Galilee and was baptised by John in
the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming
up out of the water, he saw heaven
being torn open and the Spirit
descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a
voice came from heaven: 'You are my
Son, whom I love; with you I am well
pleased.'

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into
the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the
wilderness for forty days, being
tempted^[a] by Satan. He was with the
wild animals, and angels attended him.

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

REFLECTION: WHY ARE WE HERE? (1)

Stop in the name of love

(Jesus' baptism and temptation)

Many children grow up in this world never
hearing their father say in words or hugs,
'You are my child, and I love you. I am really
pleased with you.' It is said that for many
adults in counselling the root issues go
back to a lack of affirmation and love in
childhood. People need to know they are
loved. In our Western world many fathers
find it too embarrassing or difficult to
express their love for their child. Why do

we find it so difficult to tell our children how delighted we are with them? Instead many find it easier to raise an angry voice or harsh hand.

Today we begin a series for Lent in Mark's gospel called 'WHY ARE WE HERE?' We will travel with Jesus to the cross, and our journey begins with Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness, '*Stop in the name of love*' was a song sung by the Supremes. The supreme love of God is seen here in Jesus' baptism, which finds its culmination at the cross. When Jesus came, having waited until he was thirty to begin his public ministry, he went to John to be baptised, not because he needed to repent, but his baptism revealed his true identity. As Jesus came up out of the water we see the words from heaven declaring: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (v11). The whole Christian gospel could be summed up with this one point: when the living God looks at us, at every baptised and believing Christian, he says to us what he said to Jesus on that day. He sees us as we are in Christ and says he is pleased with us.

Can you hear God speaking those words over you? "You are my dear child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." This is about our identity, and this is what the Christian gospel is all about. Jesus is the Messiah, and the Messiah represents his people. What is true of him is true of us. We need to allow these words to percolate our thoughts and change our hearts, so that we see who we really are in Christ.

And having heard words of affirmation and love, Jesus is sent out into the desert by the Holy Spirit. The road Jesus must tread, because he is God's Son, is the road through temptation. If that was the road for Jesus, it will be the road for us too. So

often in the Christian life we have times of blessing followed by times of battle and struggle. The Christian life is blessing and struggle. If we remember the voice from heaven, God's affirming words of love, then in times of struggle we will remember the blessing of his love. Sometimes struggle and blessing come at the same time.

I wonder whether the angels that attended Jesus in the wilderness simply reminded him of the words spoken by the Father. Maybe this morning we need to remember just who we are as we start this season of Lent – we are God's beloved children. But for many of us we find it easier to hear the words of the tempter, questioning whether we are really God's child. Maybe this morning you need to hear words of affirmation and love from your heavenly Father.

Mark uses a strange phrase in writing about Jesus' baptism, 'As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open...' (v10). 'Heaven torn open.' It doesn't mean that there was something like a rift in time and space like in Doctor Who. Heaven in the Bible means God's dimension behind the ordinary reality of this world. It's more as though an invisible curtain was being pulled back right in front of him.

In 2003 I went to a conference in Canada, and while I was there I experienced something of this open heaven, like a curtain being pulled back. Every day I experienced more of this open heaven. One day I went for dinner in the conference centre when a couple I'd had breakfast with that morning came over and the lady said to me 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' Suddenly I was in another place, even though I was conscious of sitting at the dinner table. The lady then said to me, 'Prophecy, Jeremiah, prophecy.'

Say what you see.’ I was seeing another realm, God’s realm. The Lord showed me what would one day be revealed in the UK and how his Spirit would bring wells of revival to quench the dry thirsty people who long for his presence. These wells of revival went to each distinct region of the UK. The lady said again, ‘Prophesy, Jeremiah, prophesy. Say what you see.’ I then saw another scene in which God the Father was dancing and laughing with his children. It was one of the most powerful experiences of God I’d ever had, but it led to one of the most difficult periods in my life, where I was truly in the wilderness.

Marc Dupont in his book ‘Pursuing Open Heavens’ writes, ‘We can’t go on presuming, through our traditions and head knowledge, that we know precisely what God can do and know what he wants to do. We need a people desperate enough for open heaven[s] – that in their cry to see more of God in the land they will “elevate their hearts above their heads”; a people who will ascend the hill of the Lord to seek his face, but also go to the low place of worship and brokenness.’

Here at Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan we are standing in the presence of a different reality altogether. So much of the Christian faith is a matter of learning to live in the light of this reality even if we can’t see it. Sometimes, at decisive and important moments, the curtain is drawn back and we catch a glimpse of what’s really going on. For the most part we walk by faith and not by sight. But one of the things Mark is saying to us here is look at this heavenly vision, hear the heavenly voice. Learn to hear these words as though they are addressed to you. Let them change you, mould you, make you the person God sees and wants you to become. Discover in this story the normally

hidden spiritual dimension of God’s world. When early Christians read this passage they would have believed that their own baptism into Jesus Christ was the moment for them when the curtain had been drawn back and these words from the Father had been spoken to them.

We need to hear again these words of love and affirmation and know that when we go into our own desert, we are still loved and affirmed by the Father. Jesus was in many ways acting out Israel’s great story of exodus and 40 years of wilderness wanderings. The road Jesus went down was a road through temptation. But if we start from a point of seeing God as an angry threatening parent we will fail at the first sign of temptation. However, if we hear the voice of our heavenly Father speaking words of love and pleasure, we will find the way through the desert and into fruitful ministry

Jesus’ baptism was eventually to lead to the cross of Calvary. The same is true for his people. In baptism and belief, we die with Christ and are raised with him. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians, ‘And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 2:6-7). If God would do all that for you, now do you doubt you are loved. So, stop in the name of love and know God’s love and delight in you.

SONG: HE WILL HOLD ME FAST

<https://youtu.be/936BapRFHaQ>

When I fear my faith will fail

Christ will hold me fast

When the tempter would prevail

He will hold me fast I

could never keep my hold

Through life's fearful path
For my love is often cold
He must hold me fast

*He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Saviour loves me so
He will hold me fast*

Those He saves are His delight
Christ will hold me fast
Precious in His holy sight
He will hold me fast
He'll not let my soul be lost
His promises shall last
Bought by Him at such a cost
He will hold me fast

*He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Saviour loves me so
He will hold me fast*

For my life He bled and died
Christ will hold me fast
Justice has been satisfied
He will hold me fast
Raised with Him to endless life
He will hold me fast
Till our faith is turned to sight
When he comes at last

*He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Saviour loves me so
He will hold me fast*

INTERCESSIONS

Loving God, we thank and praise you, that you sent your Son to be our Saviour. In the darkness of this world he comes as our light. He has triumphed over pain, sickness and death, and opened to us the way of eternal life. He has revealed your love and

made us your sons and daughters. We praise you, Lord.

Lord, our strength and Redeemer
Hear our prayer

We give thanks for all who belong to you who have stood against evil and temptation in the world. We remember before you those struggling with their faith, and all who are tempted by false promises and bright lights.

Lord, our strength and Redeemer
Hear our prayer

We pray for those who have grown up in the faith and life of the Church but have never met the Saviour. We pray for those who have gone through the ritual of baptism but have never known your presence and love. Bless all who are baptised this day across the world, that in their baptism they may hear your words of love and affirmation.

Lord, our strength and Redeemer
Hear our prayer

We pray also for those preparing for confirmation, that they would take seriously your call upon their lives. We pray too for all who are seeking to grow in their relationship with you, that they may be reminded of your promises. We pray too for those who have lost their way in life and feel life has no meaning and purpose.

Lord, our strength and Redeemer
Hear our prayer

We give thanks for all who have helped us in our Christian journey. As we journey through Lent, may we be a help to others. We pray for your Church throughout the world, for new believers, mature believers, and for leaders. We pray today for the URC

Eastern Synod as it begins the process of appointing a new Moderator. We also pray for Bishop Graham, Beth Powney and Julian Pursehouse, our denominational leaders in this area. Give them and all in positions of leadership within your Church gifts of wisdom and discernment.

Lord, our strength and Redeemer
Hear our prayer

We thank and praise you for your love for us. We ask you to bless those who are struggling with temptation and doubt at this time. We pray for all those struggling with weakness or illness, especially those who are lonely. We pray for Robert Young in hospital, that surgery would bring him a new lease of life.

Lord, our strength and Redeemer
Hear our prayer

Finally, we remember that through Christ we are offered eternal life. So, we remember before you the saints in glory and our loved ones departed. May they rejoice in your presence and in the fullness of your kingdom, where love never ends.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. 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**

SONG: LET THE WEAK SAY I AM STRONG

<https://youtu.be/OULfj6gYD0s>

Let the weak say I am strong,
Let the poor say I am rich,
Let the blind say I can see,
It's what the Lord has done in me.
(Repeat)

Hosanna, hosanna
To the Lamb that was slain;
Hosanna, hosanna,
Jesus died and rose again.

Into the river I will wade,
There my sins are washed away;
From the heavens mercy streams
Of the Saviour's love for me.

I will rise from waters deep
Into the saving arms of God;
I will sing salvation songs:
Jesus Christ has set me free.

Hosanna, hosanna
To the Lamb that was slain;
Hosanna, hosanna,
Jesus died and rose again.

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

God of all love and mercy, you have welcomed us into your family through baptism and faith. Help us to live for you, that the world may see you in us; in the power of your Holy Spirit, we pray. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love, now and for evermore. **Amen.**

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