

## **DSW Written service Sunday 1 Oct 2023**

### **Gathering prayer**

Lord Jesus,  
you are our friend and our teacher;  
you are our guide and our Saviour;  
you are our Lord,  
so we come to praise you and thank you with all  
your people. **Amen.**

### **Hymn [STF 317]**

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess him King of Glory now;  
Tis the Father's pleasure, we should call him  
Lord,  
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came;  
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,  
brought it back victorious when from death he  
passed.

Bore it up triumphant with its human light,  
through all ranks of creatures to the central  
height;  
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast,  
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him  
subdue  
all that is not holy, all that is not true;  
crown him as your captain in temptation's hour,  
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,  
with his Father's glory, with his angel train;  
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,  
and our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

*Caroline Maria Noel (1817-1877)*

### **Prayers**

Loving Living Lord,  
We sing "At the name of Jesus every knee shall  
bow" and we bow before you, because you, Lord  
Jesus, are truly God,  
And yet you gave up your equality with God and  
emptied yourself to be born as a baby in our  
human form. You came to live our lives, to teach  
us God's ways of love.  
In obedience to your Father God  
you humbled yourself and allowed yourself to be  
arrested illegally, wrongly accused, and sentenced  
to death on the cross for us, to put us right with  
God once & for all.  
And now you are exalted, and God has given you  
the name that is above every name, so that at the  
name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every

tongue will say that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Today, Lord, as we think about who you are and  
who we are, we remember that who we are is  
your friends, friends of Jesus, God's son and our  
Saviour.

So we come to worship, to bow the knee and to  
say Thank you, Lord, for calling us your friends.

But, Lord, as we look back at the things we've  
done and said this week, we know there are  
times when we haven't behaved as your friends;  
Times when we've denied or doubted your  
authority and gone our own way;  
when we've tried to be someone we are not;  
when we haven't been true to you, or to the  
gospel values you have entrusted to us;  
when we haven't reflected your image in us.  
Loving God, please forgive us;  
renew us and restore us, so that we may be the  
people you call us to be, who go where you lead  
us, and do as you would have us do.  
We ask in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

### **Hymn [STF 72]**

Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist  
Without the knowledge of Your parenthood and  
Your loving care  
Now I am Your child, I am adopted in Your family  
and I can never be alone  
'Cause Father God, You're there beside me  
*I will sing Your praises*  
*I will sing Your praises*  
*I will sing Your praises forever more*  
*I will sing Your praises*  
*I will sing Your praises*  
*I will sing Your praises forever more*

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### **Bible Reading – Matthew 21:23-32 (NIV)**

*The Authority of Jesus Questioned*

<sup>23</sup> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he  
was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of  
the people came to him.

"By what authority are you doing these things?"  
they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question.  
If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority  
I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup> John's baptism—where  
did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of  
human origin?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If  
we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why  
didn't you believe him?'" <sup>26</sup> But if we say, 'Of  
human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for  
they all hold that John was a prophet."

<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

### *The Parable of the Two Sons*

<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

<sup>29</sup> “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

### **Reflection**

Have you ever played the game Who Am I? It’s a game in which one player has to guess the name of the well-known person they are wearing on their head (which the other players can see but they can’t) by asking questions with a Yes/No answer.

You can ask questions about anything to help you identify who “you” are, as long as the answer is Yes or No, (e.g. is this person female, do they have blue eyes, are they famous, etc). our family used to love playing and we’ve played with people of all ages.

The growth of social media has meant that people can choose how to present themselves and there have been cases of people meeting others on Facebook or Instagram or TikTok who when they meet in person look very different for how they portray themselves online!

In the gospel story from the lectionary for today Jesus is challenged about who he is.

I wonder if you’ve ever been challenged about who you are, or whether you should be doing what you’re doing, whether you’re allowed to be somewhere?

Perhaps you’ve found yourself in the wrong place and been asked what you’re doing there? It’s quite embarrassing isn’t it?

I remember several years ago taking our eldest daughter to university in Sheffield for the first time and I took a wrong turn and ended up driving down a road that was reserved for trams

only and an irate tram driver shouted at me and sounded his horn as I tried to get out of the way – all very embarrassing! Not a good place to be and not a good feeling!

In the UK and elsewhere there have been instances of people from different ethnic backgrounds being verbally abused and told to “go back home” by people who clearly had no idea whether their ‘home’ was the UK (as it was in some cases) or not. Feeling that you don’t belong, and especially being told that by voices of authority, can make you feel insecure, alienated and powerless.

John Wesley was challenged by the religious authorities of his day when he went outside his parish boundaries and preached to people in the open air, and he was even subjected to rioting by those who sought to oppose him. Yet he famously wrote in his journal “I consider all the world as my parish.”

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is challenged by those in authority. ‘Who gave you authority to be here and do that?’ It’s not welcoming at all. In those days the Temple had strict rules about where certain people could go and what they could do, and the people Jesus was mixing with (‘tax-collectors and prostitutes’) would definitely not have been allowed into most parts of the Temple. But Jesus says that it’s those people, and not the authorities who are challenging him, who are closer to God.

And he tells a story about two sons who both said one thing and did something different. A reminder for his followers and for us that people can tell who we are, not just by what we’re called, or how we look, but also from how we behave, what we say and what we do. And when those things don’t match - because what we say doesn’t fit with what we do, people will form their own conclusions.

When we decide to become a Christian we make a choice to believe in Jesus and try to follow his ways. And people who don’t know who Jesus is may look to us and other Christians to find out what we believe and what Jesus is like and what he taught about how to live life.

So it’s important that what we say and do matches what Jesus asked us to say and do in his name – to behave with love and grace and justice and integrity and to welcome those who feel excluded from society.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, famously said that the Church is “the only organisation that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members.”

Part of our calling as the church of Jesus Christ is to welcome those who are not part of the church. And we need to ensure that what we say and what we do match!

So if a church has a vision statement that says “we welcome children & young people” but when they come there’s no crèche, no junior church, no toys or facilities, or when they make a noise – as all children do – they’re glared at or tutted at, (which sometimes happens in churches as I experienced when I was a young mum!) then there’s a disconnect between what we claim and what we actually do, between fine words and not so fine actions! So what we do and who we are as church has to match what we say.

A couple of weeks ago the gospel story was about Jesus asking Peter and the disciples who people said he was. In this week’s gospel story it’s Jesus who’s being challenged by people who want to know who he thinks he is. And this leads us to reflect on who we are - our identity and our authenticity before God.

If someone asked you “who are you?” I wonder what you’d say? Which labels or identifiers would you use to explain yourself to others ?

Most for us carry various labels which help to identify who we are. There’s our name of course – our given name or Christian name, and our surname or family name.

We’re identified by other labels too – we’re all sons or daughters, we may also be sisters or brothers, we may be wives or husbands, or mums or dad, or aunts or uncles, or grandparents, and we’re all friends and neighbours.

We may identify ourselves by what we do or have done in our work lives – so housewife, builder, banker, teacher, student, secretary, - are all other ways in which we might identify who we are.

But the one thing that we all have in common is that we are made in God’s image. Isn’t that an amazing concept? You and I are made in the image of Almighty God. And GOD is love, so we are made in the image of love, and we’re made to love.

The bible tells us that we are precious in the sight of God – we are his “beloved”, just as Jesus is.

We’re beloved children – you are a beloved child of God. We are all beloved of God.

One writer put it like this “each of us is an epiphany of God – a word of God which has never been spoken before – one brilliant word at a time.”

So the bottom line in our identity before God is that we are his beloved. And when we accept Jesus as the Lord of our lives, it is our relationship with Jesus that defines who we are...

As we open ourselves up to his Holy Spirit, to be changed into his likeness, we become the people God created us to be. “In him we have our being.”

We know what it is to be loved by God. And I believe that knowing that you are loved and that you belong is a gift that we have to offer, particularly to the younger generations in our society, as they deal with pressures that are very different from those many of us had to deal with at their age. According to latest research many young people feel isolated and are suffering from depression as they look for meaning in their lives.

We have a story to share about the love of God for every person, a story we can share in our words and our actions, and in our welcome to all people including those who don’t look or act or speak the way we might be used to. Older people too need to know that they are loved by God

Our calling as children of God in Jesus is to be authentic – to tell our stories about our everyday experiences of God’s love, in our own ordinary words, to help others understand that God welcomes everyone, including those who are imperfect just as we are.

Our task is to keep on inviting God in Jesus in prayer to change us from the inside out, to keep filling us with his love, so that we can see others through the eyes of Jesus – as beloved and precious – and to go and tell them through our words and actions just how precious they are to God. Amen.

### **Hymn [STF 505]**

More like you, Jesus, more like you,  
fill my heart with your desire  
to make me more like you.  
More like you, Jesus, more like you,  
touch my lips with holy fire  
and make me more like you.

Lord, you are my mercy,  
Lord, you are my grace,  
all my deepest sins have

forever been erased.  
Draw me in your presence,  
lead me in your ways,  
I long to bring you glory  
in righteousness and praise.

Lord, you are compassion,  
and never-ending love,  
for you have redeemed me  
by your precious blood.  
Create in me a clean heart,  
a spirit that is new,  
the joy of my salvation  
is only found in you.

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### **Prayers of intercession**

Loving living God

As think about authority and where it comes  
from, we pray for leaders and all who find  
themselves in positions of authority;  
For political leaders and state rulers;  
For those who work in our justice system; the  
police, courts, other agencies and the law;  
For those who work in national or local  
government offices & departments, benefits  
agencies, hospitals and social services:  
For religious and community leaders  
For workers in schools and colleges, teaching  
staff, governors and support workers  
For people in positions of influence because of  
their birth or their heritage, or because of their  
fame;  
May each and all be strong in leadership, and just  
and honest in serving their communities...  
May they be conscientious in their work, seeking  
wisdom, knowledge, insight and discernment;  
May they have compassion for all those whose  
lives are in their hands: give them gentleness,  
faithfulness, patience and kindness, we pray.

Loving Father, we pray for those who have  
misused their authority, and for those they have  
hurt; for those who have been promised much,  
but given little.

As we reflect on our identity in you,  
we pray for those who have lost their identity,  
and their sense of who they are:  
For refugees and asylum seekers; for those who  
have lost homes and loved ones in earthquakes &  
hurricanes, terrorist attacks, or accidents;  
we remember before you all those who are  
suffering from pain, whether physical, emotional  
or spiritual;  
For those who are confused, or lonely or who  
feel the loss of their identity and of a loved one;

Fill them with your presence, Lord, and help  
them to discover their true identity as your  
beloved children.  
Help each and every one of us to discover who  
we really are in you.  
We ask in the name of Jesus  
As we say the prayer he gave us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Hymn [STF 531]**

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged:  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness:  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge -  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer;  
In his arms he'll take and shield thee,  
Thou wilt find a solace there.

*Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886)*

### **Closing Prayer & Blessing:**

Loving God

Help us to be proud of who we are in Jesus,  
at home, at work, at school, at church, wherever  
we find ourselves;  
and may this week bring: ways to help others,  
times to be still, and opportunities to have fun.  
Amen.

### **Blessing**

May each of us know that we are a child of God,  
beloved in Jesus; and may we be blessed by the  
presence of God, in our lives, Father, Son & Holy  
Spirit, today and always, Amen.