

Lord, do we really believe that we are in the presence of the Son of the Living God?

Still our hearts now,
so that we may truly appreciate who you are.

As we hear these words of power,
we bow down before you and praise you. Amen.

What does it mean to call to worship, when we are in our own home? I invite you to be still and close your eyes. Picture in your mind your home and that you are standing outside the room you are now in. Picture yourself opening the door and coming into the room and sitting down. You are before God. What does that look like? What does that feel like? What are you offering Him during this time? Do not rush, take your time.

Sing or read:

- 1 I will offer up my life
in spirit and truth,
pouring out the oil of love
as my worship to you.
In surrender I must give my every part ;
Lord, receive the sacrifice
of a broken heart.
*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
to so faithful a friend, to so loving a King ?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
as a praise of your name
for the things you have done ?
O, my words could not tell, not even in part,
of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.*

- 2 You deserve my every breath
for you've paid the great cost ;
giving up your life to death,
even death on a cross.
You took all my shame away,
there defeated my sin,
opened up the gates of heaven,
and have beckoned me in.

Matt Redman (b. 1974)

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Let us pray.

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Let us confess our sins to God.

**Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you in thought and word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.**

In your mercy,
**forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**
**If we confess our sins,
God is faithful and just
and will forgive our sins,
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Matthew 16: 13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was[d] the Messiah.

Word for this week

Peter's confession is a pivotal event in the gospel story. In St Matthew's gospel its timing is rather strange because just a couple of chapters before in 14.33 a whole boatful of disciples had already confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. But that was in a very anxious situation, in the middle of a storm. There are many people who call out to the Lord when they are in a stressful situation, who at any other time never turn to God. Here the disciples are being asked for a considered opinion, in a place that isn't stressful. There were several places named Caesarea. Caesarea Philippi (Philip's Caesarea) was in the far north of the country, close to the sources of the Jordan. It is a beautiful area, with a pagan shrine dedicated to the god Pan. Standing above it is Mount Hermon and for some of the year it is capped with snow. When this melts and the rains come, this all helps to feed the springs that well up out of the ground. Jesus' first question to the disciples is about general opinion. He seems to be looking for feedback on the kind of impact his ministry is having. 'What are people saying about me?' The disciples pass on to him the general gossip. The answers only make sense if we appreciate that it was a commonly held view that great figures of the past could be in some way reincarnated. It was widely believed, for instance, that Moses and Elijah would one day return. The answers reported by the disciples assume that Jesus is one of these earlier heroes; the only debate is about which particular one he is.

Jesus now asks the big question: 'But who do you say that I am?' In Mark's Gospel the reply from Peter is simply: 'You are the Christ [i.e. messiah].' Luke has 'the Christ of God'. Only Matthew has the full statement that stands in v. 16.

Jesus' response is as significant as Peter's statement. He reacts as if something momentous has been said. He blesses Peter, who of course has never been called 'Peter' until this moment, and

Jesus seems to promise him a position of importance and authority. Unexpectedly, Jesus speaks of 'my church'. This is one of only two places in the gospels (the other is Matt 18.17) where the word 'church' appears. We may ask ourselves who is meant here by 'church' as up to that time the church had not been formed. I would like to imagine that Jesus is meaning his followers in general.

The final verse of our reading is striking. Jesus has now been recognized as messiah by his own disciples. He immediately tells them not to speak of it to anyone else. The first Christians were convinced that Jesus was the promised messiah. They saw his fulfilment of this role as a fulfilment of scripture, and the messiahship of Jesus was a vital strand in the argument when they attempted to enlist fellow-Jews. But the evidence of the gospels suggests that Jesus himself was anything but happy with the title. He may have regarded it as a distraction, and it was certainly open to serious misunderstanding. There was no single, coherent set of beliefs or expectations among the Jews regarding the messiah, and such expectations as there were, were neither as prominent nor as important a part of Jewish thinking as Christians have made them out to be. The label 'messiah' was one which the church found useful in its early mission to Jews, but in Jesus' lifetime it was a label he could probably have done very well without.

I would like you to think about your favourite title for Jesus - Friend...brother...King...Lord....Saviour...Shepherd etc. How does this help you in your relationship with him?

Sing or Read

- 1 Meet and right it is to sing,
in every time and place,
glory to our heavenly King,
the God of truth and grace :
join we then with sweet accord,
all in one thanksgiving join ;
holy, holy, holy Lord,
eternal praise be thine.
- 2 Thee the first-born sons of light,
in choral symphonies,
praise by day, day without night,
and never, never cease ;
angels and archangels all
praise the mystic Three in One,
sing, and stop, and gaze, and fall
o'erwhelmed before thy throne.
- 3 Vying with that happy choir,
who chant thy praise above,
we on eagles' wings aspire,
the wings of faith and love :
thee they sing with glory crowned,
we extol the slaughtered Lamb ;
lower if our voices sound,
our subject is the same.
- 4 Father, God, thy love we praise,
which gave thy Son to die ;
Jesus, full of truth and grace,
alike we glorify ;
Spirit, Comforter divine,
praise by all to thee be given ;
till we in full chorus join,
and earth is turned to heaven.

**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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Our prayers for other have been put together, for this week, by The Revd David Vincent.

We ask God's blessing on our nations and our leaders with so many different and complex situations - a 1,000 different issues they have to face.

Lord grant them wisdom integrity, courage and stamina for all their responsibilities. Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray too for all young people at this time, particularly thinking of all the confusion this week over their exam results and the uncertainty about their futures and the decisions they have to make. We pray particularly for the young people we know. Lord may they receive wise advice, as they consider their choices. May they have a sense of trust in your guiding presence in their lives. Lord in your love, hear our prayer.

We pray too for our church fellowship, as we prepare to restart our activities of worship, service and witness. We pray especially for Pauline, our minister, the Stewards and the Church Council, as together they plan and lead us.

God of creation, we give you thanks for your transforming presence and your gift of love in Jesus.

By your Spirit enable us to live lives of faith in this changing world. Wherever you call us to be your people may we recognise the possibilities of your kingdom, tread boldly, as we carry the gospel and love others, as you have shown us. Amen

We pray for the wider world thinking in particular of the nation of Zambia, which we support. Particularly the work of Future Pillars of Zambia. We pray for support for their work, with orphans and the schools which they run. Lord may they have the resources that they need, for their ministries of education and care. May their leaders be given vision and wisdom in their responsibilities in these difficult days. Lord in your love, hear our prayer for the people of Zambia.

Take a few moments to offer your own prayers in the quietness of your hearts

Thank you Lord that you read our hearts. You know our deepest thoughts and you love to bless us. For we pray in the name of Christ our Saviour. **Amen**

Jesus, name above all names
Beautiful Saviour, Glorious Lord
Emmanuel, God is with us
Blessed Redeemer, Living Word

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pauline". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.