

19th January 2025 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship - 1 Chronicles 16:28-29

Ascribe to the Lord glory and power. Ascribe to the Lord the glory that is due to him. Come before him with an offering.

StF 107 – I sing the almighty power of God

- 1) I sing the almighty power of God,
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
And built the lofty skies.
- 2) I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at his command,
And all the stars obey.
- 3) I sing the goodness of the Lord,
That filled the earth with food;
He formed the creatures with his word,
And then pronounced them good.
- 4) Lord, how thy wonders are displayed
Where'er I turn mine eye,
If I survey the ground I tread,
Or gaze upon the sky!
- 5) God's hand is my perpetual guard,
He guides me with his eye;
Why should I then forget the Lord,
Whose love is ever nigh?

Isaac Watts

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord our God, we declare your glory. We proclaim your power throughout all the earth. Your marvellous deeds fill us with awe and wonder. You made the heavens and the earth. Majesty and splendour are in your presence. Your throne is established for ever. The Lord is King. Your enemies may raise their voices against you, but your truth stands eternally. You have made your salvation known through your Son Jesus our Lord. You have poured out your Spirit on your church and we have a companion, a helper, a guide through all the days of our life. You are our God, and we are your people. Sovereign Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship and adore you. **Amen.**

Lord, you have saved us by your grace through faith in Jesus, and we know that we have your righteousness through Christ, yet we still get things wrong in our attitude, words and deeds. We confess our sins and shortcomings, our pride and self-sufficiency, our lack of trust, our unwillingness to step out and live with boldness for Christ. Lord, forgive, cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and draw us nearer to you so that we are strengthened in your service.

The Lord forgives us and helps us to amend our lives. **Amen.**

Reading: Isaiah 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

StF 565 – Only by grace can we enter

Only by grace can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand;
Not by our human endeavour,
But by the blood of the Lamb.
Into Your presence You call us, You call us to come.
Into Your presence You draw us,
And now by Your grace we come,
Now by Your grace we come.

Lord if You mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.
Lord if You mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.

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Reading: John 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Sermon

Many signs, wonders and miracles of Jesus are recorded in the gospels. The fourth gospel, written by the one who calls himself the beloved disciple, believed to be John, is no exception. In John's gospel, such miracles are called signs. They point to the significance of Jesus. According to verse 11 of our gospel reading, the miracle at Cana was the first of the signs that revealed his glory and led his disciples to believe in him.

According to some Bible teachers, there is a principle of understanding the Scriptures that says that the first occurrence of something is especially significant. Why, then, does Jesus' first sign take place at a wedding? If we study this passage in detail then we can see that it is packed with meaning! We have to understand that the Bible narrative is primarily a story of a relationship between God and his people, and this is often seen in terms of a marriage. Our reading from the prophet Isaiah shows this very clearly and is one of many passages to do so. Another example would be in the book of the prophet Hosea, where God's people Israel are described as being like an unfaithful wife, yet God desires the restoration of this relationship. Jeremiah 2:2 is another example, where Israel is described as a bride. Many similar references are there in Scripture.

The nation Israel had turned away from God and so fellowship between God and people was broken. The message of the prophets can be summarised as calling the people back to the restoration of this relationship. The New Testament shows that the relationship of God is not just with the bride Israel, but that people in the gentile nations can be "grafted in" to the marriage through trust in the Messiah Jesus. The church is called the Bride of Christ. Revelation chapter 19 describes the wedding feast of the Lamb (Jesus) and in Revelation chapter 22 the New Jerusalem is described as coming down from heaven like a bride adorned for her husband.

Therefore the first miracle of Jesus points to the beginning of the Messianic wedding. This is God re-wedding his people, this time not only those of Israel who trust in Messiah, but additionally those of the nations who do so. It is the restoration of communion between God and people through the Messiah. The first “wedding” between God and his people Israel took place at Sinai, Moses being the leader of the people at that time. Traditionally a Jewish wedding takes place with the bride and groom under a canopy called a chuppah (the “ch” pronounced as in the word “loch”), and involves a wedding covenant document called a ketubah. At Sinai, as is described in the book of Exodus, the mountain was covered in cloud (the chuppah) and it can be understood that the wedding document was the ten commandments.

Throughout the subsequent ages, Israel looked forward to a future leader who would be like Moses. The first Moses had performed miracles in Egypt (the ten plagues) so that the people would be released from slavery, the first miracle being the turning of water into blood, meaning the death of creatures that lived in the water. The first sign performed by Jesus was to turn water into wine, symbolising life and joy. This points to the nature of Jesus as the Messiah, not only the prophet like Moses but one who is greater than Moses! The six water jars had been filled to the brim, and this water was then turned into wine! This shows the abundance of what the Lord does for us who believe. Just as Jesus turns the water, something ordinary and relatively tasteless, into wine, something valuable and full of taste, so he can turn our ordinary lives into something full joy and value, something extraordinary! The jars were full to the brim, so Jesus wants to give us an abundance; not just a few drops of blessing. This is life in all its fullness, as Jesus tells us in John 10:10. We should not imagine that God is reluctant to give. God is not a kind of cosmic Scrooge, but is generous and desires to pour out blessings on us to the point of overflowing. The blessing that we have is limited only by our capacity to receive, not by God’s willingness to give.

Through the account of the miracle at Cana we understand that the Messianic wedding has begun! The one greater than Moses is here, and the blessings are flowing like a flood. The previous chapter of this gospel also bears witness to God’s abundant giving: “from his full store we have all received grace upon grace” (John 1:16).

The messenger, John the Baptist, who came to point not to himself but to Jesus, continues the wedding theme. In chapter 3:25-30 John testifies that he himself is not the Messiah, but merely the forerunner. He goes on to say that it is the bridegroom (Jesus) who marries the bride (his people). John himself is merely the bridegroom’s friend. In modern terms we might say that John the Baptist was the best man, but Jesus is the bridegroom.

The symbolism continues: In the Bible there is often significance in timing and numbers. John chapter 2 opens with a statement in Greek that can be translated “on the third day”. The wedding at Cana took place on the third day! Why is this important? Numbers in Hebrew are thought have meanings, and the number three is no exception. At the Creation, the third is the only day where God declared what had been made on that day to be good, twice! It’s a kind of “New York, New York, so good they named it twice” moment! Hence, the third day of the week is considered to be a good one on which to hold a wedding because it is thought of as doubly blessed. Among Jewish communities therefore it is often the case that weddings take place on the third day of the week, i.e. Tuesday. Visit Israel on a Tuesday and you may find that many weddings take place.

If we study the book of Exodus we see that God’s covenant with his people was sealed on the third day as the ten commandments were given, God’s “wedding covenant” for his people. Again, these details in the story of the miracle at Cana point to the Messianic wedding, the restoration of the relationship between the people and God. You may have attended, or be about to attend, a Covenant Service, which is the re-affirmation of a relationship between a person and God. The wedding at Cana is the beginning of a new covenant between God and his people who believe in Messiah Jesus. People from both Jewish and Gentile communities would be part of God’s covenant people through trust in Jesus. They would be wedded to the Lord.

The Gospel is about the restoration of a relationship with God. This relationship is for anyone, Jew or Gentile, who trusts in the Messiah. It is not by our works but by pure grace (John 1:16), though the restoration of that relationship will be shown to be genuine by our doing good works that God has called us to walk in (Ephesians 2:8-10).

God loves you! He desires a relationship of love and trust with you, and to pour out abundant blessings of joy upon you. Trust in Jesus, and your life can be full of colour and taste and blessing. Give the Lord the parts of your life that are dull and tasteless and Jesus can turn the ordinary into something extraordinary!

StF 563 – O Jesus I have promised

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| 1) O Jesus, I have promised
To serve you to the end;
Lord, be for ever near me,
My master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If you are by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If you will be my guide. | 3) O let me hear you speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control.
Lord, speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul. |
| 2) O let me feel you near me;
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, now draw nearer,
And shield my soul from sin. | 4) O Jesus, you have promised
To all who follow you,
That where you are in glory
Your servant shall be too;
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
My master and my friend! |

John Ernest Bode

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord, you have sent your Son to join us to yourself, and to transform our ordinary lives into something dynamic. We thank you that our lives need never be the same again, and that nothing can snatch us out of your care.

We pray for our world, for those who do not yet know Jesus: people who are adrift without anchor, building their lives without a firm foundation, travelling without compass or sense of direction. May the gospel enable them to meet the Saviour who gives stability, whose words are a firm foundation, and whose Spirit guides, that they may know the full transformation of their lives in Christ. We pray that the ordinary aspects of their lives may be changed into something wonderful, so that the gospel message may spread yet further.

We pray for nations in turmoil. For those who are at war, we pray for peace, remembering especially the Middle East and Ukraine and Russia. For those who suffer trials through the natural world, we pray for restoration, thinking particularly of people affected by the wildfires in California. For nations undergoing political change we pray for stability and good governance, thinking particularly of Syria in a time of an unknown future, and the United States in time of transition.

We pray for the United Kingdom, for wisdom for our Government, with courage to do those things that are right for the nation, and for health for our King and Royal family. Let there be a turning back in our nation to the truth of Christ. We pray for restoration in lives blighted by grooming gangs, and we look for cohesion and true community in our cities and towns.

Bless and guide those who care for us via the health service, our police and justice system, and our educational institutions, as well as our private businesses who keep our society operating, including farmers, growers, food processors and distributors as well as manufacturers and service industries.

We pray for people in our congregations and others known to us who need your touch of healing or comfort or guidance or wisdom. We pray for your peace for anyone who is anxious.

We pray for your church of all denominations, including our own circuit and individual fellowships, asking for your comfort and guidance for those whose church has closed. Guide us all in your path, so that we draw nearer to you, are filled afresh continually with the Holy Spirit, and are aflame with love and the gospel message.

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

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

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.**

StF 566 – Take my life and let it be

- 1) Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
- 2) Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for thee.
- 3) Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.
- 4) Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as thou shalt choose.
- 5) Take my will, and make it thine;
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart - it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.
- 6) Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal

Blessing

May the Saviour who turns the ordinary into the amazing have access to every part of our lives. May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us now and evermore. **Amen.**