

## 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2025 - Morning Worship

Bob Allaway

*All Scripture quotations from New International Version, Anglicized, © 2011, Biblica,*

**Call to worship:** Scripture tells us that, one day, "at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow ... and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Let us join that universal praise, even now, as we sing:

### StF 24 Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to worship.  
Come, now is the time to give your heart.  
Come, just as you are to worship.  
Come, just as you are before your God.  
Come.

One day every tongue will confess you are God  
One day every knee will bow.  
Still, the greatest treasure remains for those  
who gladly choose you now.  
Come ...

*Brian Doerksen © 1998 Vineyard Songs UK, reproduced with permission under CCL No. 515642*

### Opening prayer

Father, we do not gather here because *we* feel like it (though it is a joy for most of us), but because your Word commands us to seek you, however we may feel.  
As we hear the Scriptures read now, help us to listen,  
that through them we may be led to you, through your Son,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

### Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10

The word of the Lord came to me, saying,  
Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born, I set you apart;  
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'

'Alas, Sovereign Lord,' I said, 'I do not know how to speak; I am too young.'

But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am too young." You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the Lord.

Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.'

*This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.***

Our psalm for today is **Psalm 71:1-9**, but we are going to *sing* that Psalm, turned into a hymn:

1) Lord, in you I've taken refuge,  
let me not be put to shame;  
God most righteous, turn and save me,  
Rock of refuge, still the same;  
speak the word for my salvation,  
be the fortress of my life;  
spare me from the powers of evil,  
from their wickedness and strife.

2) From my earliest years I've known you,  
sovereign Lord of all my days,  
from the womb sustained, provided;  
let my mouth declare your praise;  
though the world may mock and wonder,  
you are my security;  
in old age do not forsake me,  
scorn not my infirmity.

*Jim Sayers b. 1966 © author, used with personal permission*

## Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession

God, our Heavenly Father,  
we thank you that no one is too old or too young to serve you.  
Aged folk recognised your Son, Jesus, as a baby in the temple.  
Little children praised him as an adult in that same temple.

Forgive us when we have judged people  
by how they have matched up to our abilities,  
instead of recognising how you can work in them,  
even when the world dismisses them  
as having the minds of children.

We ask this for the sake of Jesus your Son, who welcomed the little children.

**Amen**

## Declaration of Forgiveness

If you have truly repented of your sins, take comfort from these words of 1 John:  
This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning  
sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

And now, we shall *sing* our **Epistle Reading** - **1 Corinthians 13** as a hymn:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) Holy Spirit, gracious guest,<br>hear and grant our heart's request<br>for that gift supreme and best:<br>holy heavenly love.        | 4) Love is kind and suffers long,<br>love is pure and thinks no wrong,<br>love than death itself more strong:<br>therefore, give us love. |
| 2) Faith that mountains could remove,<br>tongues of earth or heaven above,<br>knowledge, all things, empty prove<br>if I have no love. | 5) Prophecy will fade away,<br>melting in the light of day;<br>love will ever with us stay:<br>therefore, give us love.                   |
| 3) Though I as a martyr bleed,<br>give my goods the poor to feed,<br>all is vain if love I need:<br>therefore, give me love.           | 6) Faith and hope and love we see<br>joining hand in hand agree<br>but the greatest of the three,<br>and the best, is love.               |

*Jubilate Hymns version of StF 379 'Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost', Christopher Wordsworth (1807 - 1885)  
© Jubilate Hymns Ltd, CCL No. 515642*

Let us **all** share in *the 2<sup>nd</sup> Collect for today*:

**Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are worth nothing.  
Send your Holy Spirit, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,  
the true bond of peace and of all virtues; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

**Gospel Reading - Luke 4: 16-30** (*actually from v21, but it makes no sense without vv16-20*)

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked.

Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: "Physician, heal yourself!" And you will tell me, "Do here in your home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum."'

'Truly I tell you,' he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his home town. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian.'

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

**StF 264 Make way**

Make way, make way, for Christ the King  
in splendour arrives.

Fling wide the gates and welcome Him  
into your lives.

*Make way! (Make way!)*

*Make way! (Make way!)*

*For the King of kings (For the King of kings)*

*Make way! (Make way!)*

*Make way! (Make way!)*

*And let His kingdom in.*

He comes the broken hearts to heal,  
the prisoners to free.

The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,  
the blind shall see.

*Make way! (Make way!)*

*Make way! (Make way!).....*

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,  
who weep and sigh;

With laughter, joy and royal crown  
he'll beautify.

*Make way! (Make way!).....*

We call you now to worship Him  
as Lord of all.

To have no gods before Him,  
their thrones must fall!

*Make way! (Make way!).....*

**Sermon: He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.**

That's the way NIV and most modern translations take it. However, the Greek is actually more ambiguous:

"All bore witness concerning him, and wondered at his gracious words."

Did they bear witness *for* him, wondering with awe?

Or did they bear witness *against* him, because they wondered how he could speak such nonsense?

Actually, that negative sense would fit better with what follows: **'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked. Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: "Physician, heal yourself!" And you will tell me, "Do here in your home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum." Truly I tell you,' he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his home town.'**

But why would his words so shock them?

To begin with, to quote, **The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me ...** and then say **Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing** was a claim to be the Messiah, because that is what Messiah means: 'Anointed One': anointed to do all these wonderful saving things.

We can imagine them thinking: 'Who does he think is? **Isn't this Joseph's son?**'

But they may equally have been shocked by what he did *not* say. This would have been a familiar, well-loved prophesy, with its promise of all these wonderful liberating things. So, they would all have wondered: 'Why has he cut it short? Why has he cut off all these wonderful promises in mid-sentence? What about "and the Day of Vengeance of our God"? That's how it goes on. We want to hear how God is going to clobber our enemies, like the Romans, and pay them back for all the bad things they have done to us.'

And so, Jesus reminds them **there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian.** But that is not what they want to hear: **All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.**

Jeremiah was someone else who faced hostility from his own people. In our Old Testament reading, he remembers God telling him: **I appointed you as a prophet to the nations**, that is, the Gentiles, the non-Jews. But the particular Gentiles to whom Jeremiah would minister were not sad people in need of salvation in faraway lands, but the Babylonians, who were all too near as invaders and occupying forces: just as the Romans were in Jesus' day, and Naaman the Syrian in Elisha's, which is why Jesus quotes him.

But, you may say: Isaiah 61, which Jesus quotes, *does* speak of 'the day of vengeance of our God', so why does Jesus leave it off? Not because he was opposed to belief in God's judgement – Jesus himself warned of that coming judgement, in many places in the gospels. But folk like those in Nazareth were using it to justify their *own* desire to take retribution, vengeance on their enemies, instead of leaving it for God to do in his own time, as Scripture such as Psalm 37, which Jesus quotes in the 'sermon on the mount', clearly teaches.

As the Apostle Paul rightly interprets Jesus' words: 'Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for *God's* wrath, for it is written: "It is *mine* to avenge; *I* will repay" says the Lord'.

When we recognise why Jesus is quoting this prophecy the way he does, we are not just learning about ancient history, but hearing a sadly all too relevant lesson for God's people *today* in places like the Anglican church-plant where Sylvia and I worshipped before we moved here. Our pastor, who was primarily a youth worker, knew both young people who had been murdered and those convicted of murder, in the tit-for-tat violence between different gangs. In such an environment, the call to discipleship to Jesus is a call to stand apart from what your mates are doing: to stand for peace, even if that brings rejection, hatred and violence on you. (Our pastor's ministry for peace led to him being shot at on one occasion. Thankfully, whoever it was missed.) But can we refuse such risk, knowing we follow Jesus Christ, who was prepared to go to the Cross to make peace between God and Humanity, and between people?

You may feel that what Jesus Christ *doesn't* quote is not relevant to you in your situation, but what he does quote is certainly as relevant here and now as it was then. **he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free** and all these things are summed up in **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour**. *The Year?* What special year was that?

The obvious answer is the Year of Jubilee, that the Israelites were ordered to observe in Leviticus 25, when all debts were cancelled, slaves were freed and land sold to survive in poverty was returned to its original owners. The other promises were about what God's Anointed One was going to do for those with different needs, and I am sure all in that synagogue could identify with one or more such things, so this was Good News indeed. But by stopping dead after '**to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour**', and then saying, '**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,**' they were being challenged to enact Jubilee. Were there debts owed to them, that *they* could forgive? And while I doubt if any of them were wealthy enough to own slaves, were there those they held in bondage in other ways that *they* could free?

Are we prepared to hear Jesus Christ challenge *us* from Scripture, and order our lives by what he says, or will we respond like his home congregation, and find reasons to ignore or reject him and his words?

You may wonder why, since Sylvia and I were Baptists, we joined an Anglican church-plant when I retired as a pastor, when there were plenty of Baptist congregations at hand. The answer is: because we already knew about it before it existed!

There was a Godly old lady among my church members, to whom God revealed things. She did not broadcast such things, but shared them with those she respected and for whom they were relevant, to pray through with her. She had a track record of such words proving true. One day, God gave her a literal vision that something was about to happen on that notorious local estate. As a church leadership, we took this seriously, and began to watch out for a movement of God, so we could support it. We were thrilled when we heard of that church-plant, kept them in our prayers, and eventually, when I retired, Sylvia and I were able to support them with ourselves.

When I speak of God giving such 'words of knowledge' to that old lady, and others we have known, people sometimes say, 'I wish I could hear God speaking to me like that. How can I learn to do so?' You can learn to hear God speaking to you in guidance in *unusual* ways, by learning to pay attention to what he says to you in what is indisputably of God, listening to Jesus speaking to you in the Bible (through the prophets who foretold him as well as the apostles who witness to him). Set aside time to hear him.

Study Scripture, not to amass historical knowledge, draw up prophetic timetables, or build up 'proof texts' to win theological arguments, but to hear what it says to *you*; how Christ is calling you to follow him today. May we hear Christ's Word in Scripture, striking us with the immediacy that it had for those folk in Nazareth, as Jesus said: **Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.** Amen [If you have any questions about this, do feel free to ask me.]

**StF 161 Speak O Lord** (During which any written prayer requests may be brought up.)

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to You  
to receive the food of Your holy Word.  
Take the truth, plant it deep in us;  
shape and fashion us in Your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen to-day  
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all Your purposes, for Your glory.
  
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
in the radiance of Your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
Your majestic love and authority:  
Words of power that can never fail;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.
  
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;  
help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us:  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as You walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built  
and the earth is filled with Your glory.

*Keith Getty and Stuart Townend © 2005 Thankyou Music reproduced under CCL No. 515642*

**Prayers of Intercession** leading to Lord's Prayer:

The Bible teaches 'the priesthood of all believers' which means we are all called to be intercessors for this world, which God created and for which his Son, Jesus, died.

If you would share in my intercessions, whenever I say **Gracious Father**, please respond **Hear our prayer**; I will leave pauses at times, when you can add your own thoughts.

Heavenly Father, as members of your family, we pray for our brothers and sisters, *[written requests]* and, in silence, we remember other names that are on our hearts. **Gracious Father, ...**

Your word urges us to pray for all those in authority, that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. We pray for the ceasefire to hold in the land where your Son once walked. We pray for the leaders of nations, that they may strive to do whatever may reduce violence and protect civilians, there and in other areas of conflict. **Gracious Father, ...**

We remember that violence is also a problem in our land. We pray for wisdom for the police and emergency services. May those who have lost loved ones know you close to them, to comfort them, and may young people heed their consciences and remember warnings from youth clubs and schools. **Gracious Father, ...**

We pray that the leaders of nations may have the wisdom to pursue long term solutions to save our planet's climate before seeking short term popularity. **Gracious Father ...**

We pray for those seeking to minister to those trapped by debt, and other things that hold them in bondage, and, in silence, remember before you other concerns on our hearts. **Gracious Father ...**

We ask you to accept these prayers, for we offer them in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray to you, saying:

**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.**

**Song StF 660, Called by Christ to be disciples** (during which **Offering** is brought up)

- 1) Called by Christ to be disciples every day in every place, we are not to hide as hermits but to spread the way of grace; citizens of heaven's kingdom though this world is where we live, as we serve a faithful Master faithful service may we give.
- 2) Richly varied are our pathways, many callings we pursue: may we use our gifts and talents always, Lord, to honour you; so in government or commerce, college, hospice, farm or home, whether volunteers or earning, may we see your kingdom come.

- 3) Hard decisions may confront us urging us to compromise; still obedience is our watchword – make us strong and make us wise! Secular is turned to sacred, made a precious offering, as our daily lives are fashioned in submission to our king.

Martin Leckebusch © 1999 Kevin Mayhew Ltd,  
reproduced under CCL No. 515642

### **Closing Prayer**

All things come from you, O God, and we here offer back to your service a small part of all you have given us. Accept it, we pray, as a token that we offer ourselves, all that we have and are, in the service of your Son, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us.

Send us out, now, with the blessing of your Spirit, to be his Body in the world, showing his life of love, to speed the day when all creation shall acknowledge him as King. **Amen**

Jesus says, "Go and make disciples": **and he will be with us, always! Amen**