

Circuit Service: Sunday 19th September 2021
Welcoming and Valuing Everyone – in Jesus' name
prepared by Revd Dr Ruth Midcalf

Welcome to worship this day. Whether you are on your own or in company, know that there will be others who will have or will be sharing in this service and pray for them as you come to worship. Take time to be still in God's presence.

The Psalmist writes: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name" (Psalm 100:4)

We sing together our first hymn, With gladness we worship

Hymn StF 17/Hymns and Psalms 19 With gladness we worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=705eMUhoGs8>

1. With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
Free hearts and free voices how blessed to bring;
The old, thankful story shall scale thine abode,
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.
2. Thy right would we give thee – true homage thy due,
And honour eternal, the universe through,
With all thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
In one acclamation we celebrate thee.
3. Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,
Thy children revere thee for all thou hast done,
O Father! Returning to love and to light,
Thy children are yearning to praise thee aright.
4. We join with the angels, and so there is given
From earth alleluia, in answer to heaven,
Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,
Redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

George Rawson (1807-1899)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Almighty and ever-living God, we come this day to worship you. We come to adore you for who you are:

Generous God

Gracious God

Loving God

Merciful God

Mighty God

Awesome God.....we praise you

You created us to be a people for your praise. We come, conscious of those times when what has left our lips has not been words of praise; when what we have done has not been loving and merciful, when what we have thought has not been generous. We are conscious of those times where we have not reflected your love and your compassion, your care and your grace. In a moment of quietness we ask your forgiveness.

SILENCE

Such is your love Lord God, that into this world you sent your only Son Jesus Christ to be the saviour of the world – to be our saviour. He came to bring hope and healing, justice, peace and forgiveness. As we take our next steps with you, may we know that forgiveness, and live and move in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us when we pray to say “Our Father...”

Reflection/Children’s Talk

Welkom!

Bienvenue!

Wilkommen!

Wamkelekile!

Bienvenidos!

These were just a small selection of the words on the poster that greeted me when I arrived at a building for a meeting recently. These words all mean the same, but in different languages – and the English translation was on the poster too – WELCOME!

Printed in bright colours, this poster displayed the word “WELCOME” in over 100 different languages; the intention was that anyone who walked into that place would know that they

were welcome. The word Welcome is so important that apparently when people learn a new language, it's one of the first words they learn – alongside please and thank you! ` And welcome is important in the church as well. In one of the churches in the Circuit there is some bunting hanging in the foyer saying Welcome. When the sun shines, the outline of the letters is projected onto the floor – as you walk in there is a sun-powered welcome mat to greet you! But how do we live out that welcome! Wherever we are its no good having welcome signs, if people come in and are ignored! Its no good having welcome signs, if we only make people welcome who agree with us or have to change to 'fit in'. It's no good having welcome signs if we make people feel in some way less valued or different.

If we want a pattern, a blueprint or a model for what welcome looks like then we need look no further than Jesus. Jesus didn't turn people away even when other people thought he should. What does the word 'Welcome' mean to you as a disciple of Jesus and how can you show his love in the welcome you give to others wherever you are?

Hymn StF 327 Jesus is King/Hymns and Psalms 257 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQWP5LYtiZA>

1. Jesus is King and I will extol him,
Give him the glory, and honour his name;
He reigns on high, enthroned in the heavens,
Word of the Father, exalted for us.
2. We have a hope that is steadfast and certain,
Gone through the curtain and touching the throne;
We have a priest who is there interceding,
Pouring his grace on our lives day by day.
3. We come to him, our Priest and Apostle
Clothed in his glory and bearing his name,
Laying our lives with gladness before him
Filled with his Spirit we worship the King:
4. O Holy One, our hearts do adore you;
Thrilled with your goodness we give you our praise!
Angels in light with worship surround him,
Jesus, our Saviour, fore ever the same.

Wendy Churchill, 1982. ©Authentic Publishing
Adminstrators: Integrity Music
CCLI Song Number: 56558

Reading: Mark 9: 30-37

Sermon

Some years ago now I ran (I use the term loosely), my first and only half-marathon in Brighton. I've got the medal to prove it! I was reminded of this while watching footage of the Great North Run which took place recently – advertised as the World's biggest half-marathon with over 50000 competitors. I remember standing in the crowds at the Brighton Half Marathon ready to go – thousands of us, all running for different reasons, all unique but, in our diversity brought together by a common aim – to run together, to journey together.

It was the same with the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking in our reading from Mark's Gospel. They were a diverse group of people; some fishermen, a tax collector, some whose professions we don't know but they were likely tradesmen of some kind. What brought them together was their common calling – their welcome from Jesus in the form of the words 'Follow me'. Without that, some of their paths may never have crossed.

And as well as their paths crossing, sometimes their words did too. We can sometimes fall into the trap of a very rose-tinted spectacles view of Jesus travelling with the disciples in a permanent atmosphere of peace and harmony. So it's quite arresting to the senses when we discover in our reading today that as they have travelled to Capernaum, perhaps to the house of Simon Peter and Andrew, they have been arguing. Jesus knows they have been arguing – and he knows what they have been arguing about. As they have been walking along the road, they've been arguing about who among them is the greatest. Jesus knows that but he wants to hear it from them. The disciples cannot bring themselves to respond in words, but their silence speaks volumes. They are ashamed – they realise that the content of their conversation was not appropriate.

Jesus speaks into the silence with a sentence, that as so often when Jesus speaks, overturns 'usual' practices and conventions. In a culture where someone's status in society had a marked impact on their life financially, socially and in many other ways, Jesus' words speak of kingdom values – "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

I often wonder when I think of the disciples about whether they spent quite a lot of their time with Jesus with their lower jaws on the floor – open mouthed at what taking his words seriously would mean. If their jaws have made it even half-way to the floor at this point then they will get lower – for Jesus speaks again. As he holds a child in his arms he says "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me"

Perhaps to us, the idea of welcoming children doesn't seem very radical. But in the culture and context into which Jesus was speaking it most certainly did. Some of us may have heard the phrase years ago 'Children are to be seen and not heard' but for those to whom Jesus was speaking children were not to be seen either. Children were "socially invisible", of no consequence— and yet Jesus states that whoever welcomes a child in his name, welcomes Him.

"Well", we might say "things are different now" ...but are they really? I shudder when I hear the children and young people in our congregations referred to as 'the church of tomorrow' when they are critical, valued and loved by God as active participants in the church of today. How do we ensure that valuing? And what if we widen our view of children to be a non-aged-based view. Each one of us is a child of God. But do we believe that some are greater than others or even, that we are greater than others?

When I ran that half-marathon 9 years ago, I certainly wasn't first! When I got my medal, I was pleased but over time I've reflected much more not so much what it says on the medal, but what it says on the ribbon – "Finisher". In God's economy all are precious, all are loved, all are welcomed. Let us ensure that's the case for all who God places to run and walk alongside us in the journey of life. Let us encourage one another. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith". To Him be the praise and the glory.

AMEN.

Hymn STF 504/Hymns and Psalms 739 May the mind of Christ my Saviour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE5fOXSymBc>

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| 1. May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do or say. | 4. May the love of Jesus fill me
As the waters fill the sea
Him exalting – self forgetting -
This is victory. |
| 2. May the word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through his power. | 5. May I run the race before me
Strong and brave to face the foe
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go. |
| 3. May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing. | Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928)
©1992 The Jubilate Group.
CCL Song Number 1039031 |

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

As we come to our Prayers of Thanksgiving make a note, either on paper or in your mind, of those people or situations that you want to thank God for.

Let us pray: Loving Lord we have so much to thank you for this day.

Thank you for (share the people or situations you noted)

Thank you that you created us, that you welcome us as your children, that you love us.

Thank you that you loved this whole world so much you sent Jesus to show us the way to live and offer us life in all its fulness both now and into all eternity.

Thank you that you continue to empower and refresh, renew and equip us by the power of your Holy Spirit for all that you call us to do. AMEN.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord of love, we bring your world before you, the world that we are called to steward and care for. We pray for those areas of your world ravaged by the effects of humanities overuse or destruction, war and conflict. We pray for all who work to care for your world and its people, all who work to bring peace and reconciliation. We continue to pray for those participating in the COP-26 relay to Glasgow organised by the Youth Climate Change Network, praying that you will show us how to be better stewards of your world and work for climate justice.

Lord of love, hear us in your love.

Lord of love, we pray for your church throughout the world. We pray for all who have or will be worshipping you this day wherever they are. We pray for those who are not able to worship you in public for fear of their lives; give them courage, peace and hope. We pray for our local churches, our ecumenical partners, our wider Circuit. May we look to you as our guide and be congregations and communities where all are welcomed and valued.

Lord of love, hear us in your love.

Lord of love, we pray for those who feel unloved or unlovable this day; those who feel they have no value; those who have been made to feel unwelcome. We pray for all who need your presence and your peace, your comfort and your hope, your healing and your joy.

(You may wish to name individuals and situations in your personal prayers)

Lord of love, hear us in your love.

Finally, Lord of love, we pray for ourselves. May we know ourselves loved to the uttermost, welcomed and valued by you and may we extend that love to all we meet, in Jesus' name.
AMEN

Hymn StF 676/Hymns and Psalms 764 Christ from whom all blessings flow

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjMlf_dvJ4s

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| 1. Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
Perfecting the saints below,
Hear us, who thy nature share,
Who thy mystic body are. | 4. Never from thy service move,
Needful to each other prove,
Use the grace on each bestowed,
Tempered by the art of God. |
| 2. Join us, in one spirit join,
Let us still receive of thine;
Still for more on thee we call,
Thou who fillest all in all. | 5. Love, like death, has all destroyed
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall:
Thou, O Christ, art all in all. |
| 3. Closer knit to thee, our Head,
Nourished, Lord, by thee and fed,
Let us daily growth receive,
More in Jesus Christ believe. | <i>Charles Wesley (1707-1788)</i> |

Blessing

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, AMEN.