

Circuit Service 5th February 2023

Picture to contemplate leading into worship: partly frozen lake at Dinton Pastures in the cold snap



*For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth, over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our joyful hymn of praise*

Hymn StF55 Immortal, invisible, God only wise

[HALIFAX MINSTER-IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, GOD ONLY WISE - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.</p> <p>2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light, nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might — thy justice like mountains high soaring above thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.</p> <p>3 To all life thou givest, to both great and small ; in all life thou livest, the true life of all ; we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree, and wither and perish ; but naught changeth thee.</p>	<p>4 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight ; all praise we would render : O help us to see 'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.</p> <p>5 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.</p> <p>Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908)</p>
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Prayers

*Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.*

Lord God, the Ancient of Days, we thank you for the privilege of coming before you. You are God and we are mortal human beings. You are in heaven and we are on Earth. You have created us and without you we would not exist. You watch over us and care for us even when we wander away from you. We recall before you this week – its joys and sorrows – the things we have done right and the things we have done wrong. We acknowledge our sinfulness and ask your forgiveness.

It is by grace that we are saved – through Jesus Christ our Lord who gave his life on the cross to remove the barrier that separates us from you. When Jesus died, the great curtain in the temple was torn in two so that we may enter your holy presence. Lord draw us into your presence now. May we know you moving amongst us. May we feel your healing touch. May we know that we are loved. Teach us to love one another.

In gratitude and in the name of Jesus we make this prayer.
Amen

All age talk

Does anyone here wear a bracelet on their wrist? For that matter, does anyone wear a bracelet on their ankle? A few years ago it was fashionable for Christians to wear bracelets with the letters WWJD. They weren't fashionable in the sense that they look particularly beautiful. They were a reminder that we follow Jesus at all times in our lives – not just when coming to church.



Can anyone tell me what WWJD stands for?

It stands for 'what would Jesus do?' The idea is that it reminds us what to do in difficult situations – or in any situation. We should try to imagine what Jesus would do and then follow his example.

A few years later, people started wearing a similar bracelet but with different letters: HWLF



Anybody know what HWLF stands for?

It stands for 'He would love first'. If you were having difficulty deciding what Jesus would do, just remember that Jesus always acted out of love. Even if we can't decide what Jesus would do, if we act out of love we won't go far wrong.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, there are many times when we're not sure what to do. On these occasions, help us to think about you and what you would do. And if we're not certain what you would do, help us always to act out of love – because love is what is most important – to consider other people and what they would wish for. Lord, we thank you that love is what matters most to you. You love us and you send your Spirit to guide us in the ways of love. Lord we thank you. Amen.

Now a hymn about treading in the footsteps of Jesus:

Hymn StF476 One more step along the world I go

[BBC songs of praise - One More Step Along The World I Go - YouTube](#)

<p>1 One more step along the world I go, one more step along the world I go ; from the old things to the new keep me travelling along with you : <i>and it's from the old I travel to the new ; keep me travelling along with you.</i></p> <p>2 Round the corners of the world I turn, more and more about the world I learn ; all the new things that I see you'll be looking at along with me :</p>	<p>4 Give me courage when the world is rough, keep me loving though the world is tough ; leap and sing in all I do, keep me travelling along with you :</p> <p>5 You are older than the world can be, you are younger than the life in me ; ever old and ever new, keep me travelling along with you :</p> <p>Sydney Carter (1915–2004)</p>
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<p>3 As I travel through the bad and good, keep me travelling the way I should ; where I see no way to go you'll be telling me the way, I know :</p>	
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Introduction to the readings

The gospel reading is the Beatitudes from Matthew's gospel – so this needs no introduction. The challenge is to hear it as though we have never heard it before. It's too familiar. It's easy to not notice how revolutionary it is. It's counter-cultural in our present time – and probably in any time in the past or in the future.

The other reading is from Paul's first letter to Corinth. The church in Corinth was very young and it was running into all sorts of problems. Other itinerant preachers had called in while Paul was away and the church was breaking into factions according to which preacher they followed. Paul's first task in the letter was to point out that the gospel was not the gospel of Paul, or the gospel of Apollos, or the gospel of Peter. It is the gospel of Christ. At the end of the passage Paul comes up with the memorable sentence, 'But we have the mind of Christ'. I'll say more about that in a moment.

Readings

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Corinthians 2:10b-16 starting at 'The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.'

Hymn StF18 Be still and know that I am God

[Be still and know that I am God. Lyric video \(StF 18\) - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God.</p> <p>2 I am the Lord who saves and heals. I am the Lord who saves and heals. I am the Lord who saves and heals.</p>	<p>3 In you, O Lord, I put my trust. In you, O Lord, I put my trust. In you, O Lord, I put my trust.</p> <p>Anonymous Based on Psalm 46:10-11</p>
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Sermon

I live on the Lower Earley estate in South-East Reading. Our house is within a few minutes walk of the main shopping centre. Our road is a cul-de-sac so we don't get much traffic going past. But there are many footpaths leading from our road to other parts of the estate. So we get lots of people walking past. Some are going to the shops, some taking children to school and others just stretching their legs. People are so different and I can't help wondering what their lives are like. People going to work. Children going to school in various states of willingness. Elderly people struggling with heavy shopping. People delivering leaflets.

We also get a fair number of dog walkers. The dogs intrigue me. Tails wagging away in their pleasure at getting outside. Other dogs choosing suitable hedges and bushes to leave their mark. Some dutifully walking alongside their owners, others straining at the leash. Some looking like they want to play, others appearing ready to respond aggressively at a small provocation. What's it like to be a dog? They have different natures and behaviours all rooted in their particular brand of doginess. Dogs don't decide as a conscious choice to be playful or suspicious. It's rooted in who they are.

The same goes for us. Our behaviour is rooted in who we are. At the margins, our behaviour is something we decide on, but most of our behaviour is an expression of our nature. It used to be popular to divide people into extraverts and introverts. I'm an introvert, and no amount of effort on my part will turn me into an extravert. It's the way I am.

Another popular classification was divergers and convergers. Convergers like to narrow down a problem to its essence and concentrate on that. Divergers like to throw the issue open and see it from all angles. Myers-Briggs tests were an attempt to make all this scientific. Myers-Briggs classifies me as INFP but we're much more than can be classified by four letters. The truth is we are all much more complicated. Introverts can act extravertly. Convergers can act divergently and vice versa. And so on.

We are all wonderfully complex, and we celebrate the difference. However long we live with somebody they can always be a surprise. If each dog has its own version of doginess, so each of us has our own version of humanness – if 'humanness' is the right word.

The point I want to make is that our behaviour is rooted in our nature. What we do is rooted in who we are. This applies to us as Christians. We are all wonderfully different but there is something we all aspire to in common as we follow Jesus. Paul puts it like this at the end of our reading from 1 Corinthians – *'But we have the mind of Christ'*. This is an amazing statement. It correlates with a lot of New Testament teaching. Paul is always describing us as being 'in Christ'. He describes us as being filled with the Spirit. As Jesus puts it in John's gospel, we are to remain in him as he and the Father remain in each other and in us.

I want to read again a few verses from our reading about how God's Spirit connects us to the mind of God

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God...

All very mysterious, but who said that having the mind of Christ is easily understood – or even can be understood at all.

I don't know your reaction to Paul's words about having the mind of Christ, but my response is to say that I am a long way from this being true of me. I am a sinner, so how can I say that I have the mind of Christ? I classify Paul's words along with the command of Jesus: *'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.'* It's not something we can attain this life. It's a direction of travel. By the grace and love of God this is the direction we are heading however inadequately. We are forgiven sinners who God accepts and loves as we are. Whatever version of humanness we have, God is at work in us to make it a godly humanness – respecting and loving us as we are but gaining a deeper rootedness in God's mind and Spirit that transforms us.

A few years ago you would see people wearing bracelets with the letters WWJD standing for 'What would Jesus do?' (already referred to in the All Age talk) The bracelet was a reminder in difficult situations to follow Jesus. A few years later these bracelets were followed by bracelets with the letters HWLF standing for 'He would love first'. This acknowledges that whatever Jesus did it was rooted in love. It's one thing to try to work out what Jesus would do and then do the same. But whatever we do has to be rooted in love or there is a certain hollowness to it. What matters is what's going on in the depths of who we are. If we are to follow Jesus, we need to love as Jesus loved. We need the mind of Christ. As dogs do not decide by deliberate choice to wag their tail – it happens as a natural expression of their doginess – so our goal is to act lovingly because the love of Jesus inhabits our souls. And for that we need to live in communion with Christ.

If we want to understand what it means to have the mind of Christ we should look at the gospel reading. The Beatitudes are an insight into the mind of Jesus. His teaching tells us what mattered to him. We find out what Jesus saw when he looked at people. He saw whether they were poor in Spirit, whether they were mourning, whether they were meek - or hungered and thirsted for righteousness – or merciful – or pure in heart – or peacemakers. When you or I look at a person, what do we see? Do we see them in the terms that Jesus saw people? If so, we are on the way towards having the mind of Christ? If not, we have some way to go on that journey.

Another thing to note is that Paul doesn't write, 'But I have the mind of Christ'. He writes 'we'. It is together that we have the mind of Christ. As Jesus said, we are the vine. And as Paul wrote, we are the Body of Christ. It is together that we are the vine or the Body. None of us by ourselves individually is the vine or the Body. We have different functions and gifts within the Body and all are needed. So it is - only together do we have the mind of Christ. None

of us is superfluous. In our different varieties of humanness, we are all equally needed if we together are to have the mind of Christ.

Our calling as the church is to have the mind of Christ, to be filled by the Spirit of Christ, and to act as the Body of Christ. We need to see with the eyes of Christ and look on the world as Christ looks on the world.

For this we must stay close to him for we cannot manage this in our own strength. We need to walk with Christ day to day as he walks with us – wear our bracelets in our hearts if not on our wrists. At the centre of it all is our closeness to God. On him we depend.

Hymn StF447 Jesus be the centre, be my hope, be my song

[Jesus be the centre - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Jesus, be the centre, be my source, be my light, Jesus.</p> <p>2 Jesus, be the centre, be my hope, be my song, Jesus.</p> <p><i>Be the fire in my heart, be the wind in these sails; be the reason that I live, Jesus, Jesus.</i></p>	<p>3 Jesus, be my vision, be my path, be my guide, Jesus.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i></p> <p><i>(verse 1 is repeated.)</i></p> <p>Michael Frye</p>
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Prayers (please make these prayers your own in the light of events)

We now pray to God for ourselves and the world. In making our prayers we ask that we may pray with the mind of Christ and see the world through his eyes.

Lord, we pray about the state of war that exists in Europe. We ask that peace may prevail with justice – that right may be done – that the suffering of the innocent may be brought to an end.

We pray for Afghanistan where there is poverty caused by an ideologically intolerant regime which follows years of combat. The misery there this winter is compounded by extreme cold weather.

We pray for Israel and Palestine. We have seen on the news the shooting and killing. We pray that there may be peace, justice and security for all.

Lord, we see so much inequality in the world – between nations, between factions within nations, between rich and poor, between races and between genders. Open our eyes to see our part in this historically and in the present – and to see what we must do. We ask that we may have the mind of Christ and do our part to change ourselves and the world.

Lord, we pray for our community – our local church – our friends – our families. We thank you for the joy we find in sharing our lives with others. And we hold before you those we know who are in need – we ask you to bless them and support them in your love.

Lord, your love for us is an undeserved mystery. We can only thank you that you stand with us in our joys and sorrows, and in our efforts to follow you. Lord, be with us when this meeting ends. Help us to stay in communion with you until we meet again.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is our Lord, our saviour, and our friend, we make these prayers. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, they 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

Offering

Lord we ask you to the bless the offerings we make – offerings of money, of our service, and of our very selves. Accept our offering and use it for the coming of your kingdom.

Hymn StF503 Love divine

[Love Divine, All Love Excelling, from the Royal Albert Hall - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down, fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown. Jesu, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art ; visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.</p> <p>2 Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive ; suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave. Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above, pray, and praise thee, without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.</p>	<p>3 Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be ; let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee : changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise !</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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Blessing

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. And may the blessing of God – Father/Son/Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.