



Stamford Methodist Church and Circuit



Streamed worship : Sunday 27th September 2020

Led by Sarah Lamb, Circuit Children & Family Work Enabler

Prayers led by Rev'd Bekkie Wright, Probationer Minister

Page |
1

Opening Worship Song-

There is a higher throne
Than all this world has known,
Where faithful ones from ev'ry tongue
Will one day come.
Before the Son we'll stand,
Made faultless through the Lamb;
Believing hearts find promised grace—
Salvation comes.

*Hear heaven's voices sing;
Their thund'rous anthem rings
Through em'rald courts and sapphire skies.
Their praises rise.
All glory, wisdom, pow'r,
Strength, thanks, and honor are
To God our King, who reigns on high
Forevermore.*

And there we'll find our home,
Our life before the throne;
We'll honor Him in perfect song
Where we belong.
He'll wipe each tear-stained eye
As thirst and hunger die.
The Lamb becomes our Shepherd King;
We'll reign with Him.

*Hear heaven's voices sing;
Their thund'rous anthem rings
Through em'rald courts and sapphire skies.
Their praises rise.
All glory, wisdom, pow'r,
Strength, thanks, and honor are
To God our King, who reigns on high
Forevermore, forevermore
Repeat*

Welcome and gathering prayer.

Welcome to this week's online service for the Stamford Circuit. My name is Sarah Lamb, I am the circuit children and family worker and a final year student Minister. It is good to join with you as we worship God together in this online and at home space. As we focus our hearts and minds on God, I light a candle as a sign of God's presence, maybe you would like to light one too.

Let us Pray

Loving God, as we light this candle we ask you to make yourself known with us, where ever we may be, we ask that we may remember that though apart, we are united by your love and worship you as one with all your people. We pray that in this time we may look to you, in hope, in expectation and open to hear your word today. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Introduction. Whose authority?

In our Gospel reading today we are going to hear people questioning Jesus' authority, they ask "on who's authority do you do these things?" Well that is quite a pertinent question today isn't it? Whose authority do we live by, and so regularly we question the authority of those in any form of leadership. We might say "who put you in charge?" or who are you to tell me what to do! These things seem oh so familiar at the moment don't they?

Today I hope to help us think about who or what has authority in our lives, and how we exercise the authority given to us, and as we reflect on this, we consider the authority of Jesus, and what this looks like from a kingdom perspective.

The Old Testament readings set for today are both proclaiming the mighty acts of God, who brought his people out of slavery in Egypt, provided for their physical needs in the wilderness and proved himself faithful and true, A God in whom they could put their trust and whose power and authority were to be celebrated and told from generation to generation.

Psalms 78 1-4 says:

Oh my people listen to my instructions. Open your ears to what I am saying, for I will speak to you in parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us. We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders.

And so we pray;

Lord God as hear the stories handed down to us of your faithfulness to your people Israel as you led from slavery and persecution, travelling with them in cloud and fire, providing for them along the way, we lift our voice in praise today, as we proclaim the your power and mighty wonders.

Lord God, as we read your word and know that you are not a God who is distant, but through your love became one with us, born as a helpless child, living among us showing your power through acts of love and service; we lift our voice in praise today, that you continue to move amongst us, healing forgiving and setting your people free.

Lord God, as we know your Spirit within us, equipping, enabling us to speak your word and act in your love; we lift our voice in praise today, for you are not only the God of our ancestors, not only the God who became flesh, but you are also the God alive and with us today.

Lord God, Father Son and Holy Spirit we worship you, as we proclaim your power and mighty wonders .
Amen

I invite you to join me in the words of the creed, the statement of faith passed from generation to generation:

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

This is the God in whom we believe, this is the God in whom we trust, this is the God who forgives our sins, this is the God who calls us beloved, this is our God, to you Lord we bring our lives as a daily offering, that you may show and shape our lives as we follow you.

Song: 'From heaven you came' by Graham Kendrick

From heaven you came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

*This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King*

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said
Refrain

Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered
Refrain

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone him
Each others needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving.
Refrain

Bible reading: Matthew 21:23-32

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Sermon

On whose authority? Well as I have already mentioned that is quite a familiar question for the moment, so many people asking what or who gives particular people the authority to do and lead in the way they do, or I suppose another aspect of that question is what is the motivation or attitude behind the authority, I'm sure we can all think of many examples where it seems to be about personal gain or oppression of others. But authority isn't always bad, after all sometimes clear leadership and authority is exactly what is needed!

Authority is power and it shape us, and I wonder what or who you might say holds authority in your life? I wonder how you feel about it, and I suppose the big question is what if it goes against or challenges your own views and circumstance.

Then of course we must remember that sometimes it is we who hold the power or authority, how often do we stop to consider the other viewpoints, do people feel the need to question your authority?

I start by asking these questions, because today I think one of the important reflections to come out of this reading is who has the authority in our lives, do we live by the authority of man or of God? How we answer that will surely affect the way we respond to others, and how we use the authority given to us.

So let's give some context to this reading. Jesus has been traveling around casting out demons, healing the sick and telling people their sins are forgiven. He has attracted large crowds of followers listening as teaches them about God's kingdom. Tension has been rising among the Jewish leaders and authorities, and now Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. He came riding into town on a donkey as the crowds cheered and hailed him as one who had come in the name of the Lord. His first visit, to the temple, driving out the money lenders and accusing them of turning His Father's house into a den of thieves. Now he is sitting teaching in the temple. There really is no wonder the leaders are asking these questions, and I suppose the one they really want to ask is "So are you the Messiah?"

It is clear that Jesus was teaching and doing these things with authority, and yet it was not the sort they were used to. Jesus taught that true authority comes NOT through "Lording it over people as the kings and rulers do, but by being the servant." He taught that the greatest power was that of love and that any leader should do so by example.

Once again Jesus showed that the values of Gods kingdom were not like the values of the world, that the first will be last and the last first, that there is strength in weakness and power in humility. Authority in God's kingdom is seen in love and service, it is received by those who chose and not imposed against ones will.

As the leaders were still grappling with his answer, Jesus tells them this story of 2 sons, one who says no, but changes his mind, and one who says yes, but fails to act. Obviously Jesus is highlighting the difference between the tax collectors etc and those who were professing to follow God, but maybe we should be asking ourselves this question today. We can all find ourselves saying the right words and yet knowing in our hearts that we really don't act or respond as we say. But Jesus also shows that it's never too late, there is time and opportunity to respond and act.

So maybe today is that moment to ask ourselves are we like either of these two sons? to ask ourself again, who has authority in my life, who shapes my thoughts and responses?

In Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 2 (which is the Epistle reading set for today) Paul encourages the people there to take on the attitude of Christ, to work together with one mind and purpose. Not to be selfish or act in your own interests, but to humble, and of the attitude of Christ, the one who God elevated to the place of honour, the name above all names, to whom every knee shall one day bow.

That seems a tall order doesn't it, to have the attitude of Christ, is that really possible? Well I guess a good way to start is by getting to know him as deeply as possible, by spending time in prayer and reading his word, by inviting his Holy Spirit to guide you and help you. The Methodist church has taken this so seriously that it has been working on some materials to help us develop this into our daily lives. They have produced the "Methodist way of life", and over the coming weeks and months I'm sure you will hear much more about this. But as we think particularly about authority in our lives today, I really recommend you look at this resource and see it as an opportunity to go deeper in your relationship with God, and place him as the king of your life, the one who moulds and shapes who you are and how you live.

There is a very true saying, that a good leader leads by example, and we all know what happens when this isn't true! So today the challenge is this, who has the authority in your life, how does that shape who you are, and do you lead by that example? Today when we are quick to judge the leaders of nations, groups, etc, what example do we set?

I pray that we may be people who display the attitude of Christ, seeking to be people of hope, truth and light. A people who care for others and work together with one purpose of love and compassion. A people who live by the authority of Christ, challenging unjust authorities and leading by the example of Jesus.

Response time

As the next song plays I invite you to use this time to reflect on these questions in your own life, and maybe as the song suggests, surrender all things to Jesus, giving him authority in your life.

I Surrender All. Israel Houghton

All to Jesus I surrender
 All to Him I freely give
 I will ever love and trust Him
 In His presence daily live
 All to Jesus I surrender
 Humbly at His feet I bow
 Worldly pleasures all forsaken
 Take me Jesus take me now
I surrender all
I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed Saviour
I surrender all

All to Jesus I surrender
 Make me Saviour wholly Thine
 Let me feel the Holy Spirit
 Truly know that Thou art mine
 All to Jesus I surrender
 Lord I give myself to Thee
 Fill me with Thy love and power
 Let Thy blessings fall on me
 All to Jesus I surrender
 Now I feel the sacred flame
 Oh the joy of full salvation
 Glory, glory to His name.

Prayers for others led by Rev'd Bekkie Wright

God of loving authority,
Strengthen us to speak your word into the world.

Just as it saddens your heart to see the suffering of any of your beloved children, it saddens our hearts too. We bring to mind all those in our locality and all those we know who find themselves in a hard place at this time. As Covid increases and restrictions tighten again, as winter draws nearer, as people face illness and loss of employment: Lord, come breathe on your people. By your Holy Spirit empower us to speak your words of loving authority into the world. Bring great love, hope and joy through us your church. Help us to minister to others in the strength of your Spirit and to work in unity together. May we shine your glorious light into the darkness and remain steadfast and true to you.

Page |
7

Just as it disturbs you when world leaders embrace division instead of unity, pursue wealth instead of justice and conceal lies instead of speaking out the truth, it disturbs us too. We lift all those in leadership to you. Come guide their thoughts and inspire their actions. At a time when our leaders are being asked to make difficult decisions balancing economy and lives, future sustainability and present safety we ask that you are in those decisions. As a church, empower us to speak your words of loving authority into this world of decisions.

Just as it hurts you to see the difference between rich and poor widening and to see the divide between humanity and the natural world, it hurts us too. We lift these growing divisions to you and ask for miracles of provision, healing and restoration. Speak into our churches and our lives and help us to listen so that we might play our part in changing the world.

God of loving authority,
Strengthen us to speak your word into the world.

Amen.

Let us now join together in the words that Jesus taught us to say:

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.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
Forever and ever,
Amen.

Closing Words and Blessing

Thank you Rev Bekkie

And as we come to the end of our formal time of worship together, we remember that all our life is an offering of worship to God, and so our prayers become the love and service we offer to others, and Christ's presence is made known through us. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Let's say the Grace together

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

Hymn: At the Name of Jesus

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

At his voice creation sprang at once to sight:
all the angel faces, all the hosts of light,
thrones and dominations, stars upon their way,
all the heavenly orders in their great array.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name
from the lips of sinners, unto whom he came;
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death he passed;

Bore it up triumphant, with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures, to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast,
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true.
Look to him, your Savior, in temptations' hour;
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

Christians, this Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory o'er the earth to reign;
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

Please contact Rev Andy Fyall the circuit superintendent minister if you would like to talk with or pray with someone about today's service.