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Service for the 6th Sunday after Trinity, 11th July 2021

A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, let us worship the invisible God. Our eyes have not seen, but our hearts sing praises. Come, let us tell of His wonderful works. Our ears have not heard, but our tongues tell his greatness.

HYMN: Immortal, invisible

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

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|---|---|
| 1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of
Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise. | 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. |
| 2 Unresting, unchanging, 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. | 4 Great God of all glory, great God of all 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. |

Walter C Smith

PRAYERS of adoration, thanksgiving & confession

Let us pray

Invisible God, we adore you, unseen creator of a visible universe. You have been crafting and accomplishing forever – forming seas and lands, mountains and the mysteries of space – out of nothing. Before the world began, you were planning for today and tomorrow.

Invisible God, we worship you.

Invisible God, we adore you: seen in Jesus, the Word made flesh. You have been working among us since humankind first flourished, planning for our future and weaving your love around us. The shadow of the Cross and resurrection love were present at the time of creation.

Invisible God, we worship you.

Invisible God, we adore you, rushing like the wind over the face of creation. We know you as the Spirit at work in our lives, unseen but real in our experience.

Invisible God, we worship you.

Father, we thank you for invisible things made visible to us today in all the wonders of creation; but most of all for Jesus, who came to show us the heart of the unseen Father. We give you thanks and praise.

Unseen God, you see our secret thoughts and the things we are hiding. We are sorry for the things we think and do because we know we can get away with it. Forgive us for our failures, for our blindness to the needs of others, and for our lack of faith and love. Forgive the cruelty and inhumanity in your world, which bring grief and pain to others. We come in sorrow to your throne of grace.

In repentance and in faith, receive the promise of grace and the assurance of pardon. Here are words you may trust, words that merit full acceptance...

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
To all who turn to Him he says "Your sins are forgiven".
He also says "Follow me!"

Thanks be to God.

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.**

HYMN: God, who made the earth

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment*

1 God, who made the earth,
the air, the sky, the sea,
who gave the light its birth:
God cares for me.

2 God, who made the grass,
the flower, the fruit, the tree,
the day and night to pass:
God cares for me.

3 God, who sent His Son
to die on Calvary,
will, when life's clouds come on,
still care for me.

Sarah Betts Rhodes (altd)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

St Mark 6: 14-29

¹⁴ Now King Herod heard about all this, because Jesus' reputation had spread everywhere. Some people were saying, "John the Baptist has come back to life! That is why he has this power to perform miracles."

¹⁵ Others, however, said, "He is Elijah."

Others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

¹⁶ When Herod heard it, he said, "He is John the Baptist! I had his head cut off, but he has come back to life!" ¹⁷ Herod himself had ordered John's arrest, and he had him tied up and put in prison. Herod did this because of Herodias, whom he had married, even though she was the wife of his brother Philip. ¹⁸ John the Baptist kept telling Herod, "It isn't right for you to marry your brother's wife!"

¹⁹ So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she could not because of Herod. ²⁰ Herod was afraid of John because he knew that John was a good and holy man, and so he kept him safe. He liked to listen to him, even though he became greatly disturbed every time he heard him.

²¹ Finally Herodias got her chance. It was on Herod's birthday, when he gave a feast for all the top government officials, the military chiefs, and the leading citizens of Galilee. ²² The daughter of Herodias came in and danced, and pleased Herod and his guests. So the king said to the girl, "What would you like to have? I will give you anything you want." ²³ With many vows he said to her, "I swear that I will give you anything you ask for, even as much as half my kingdom!"

²⁴ So the girl went out and asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

²⁵ The girl hurried back at once to the king and demanded, "I want you to give me here and now the head of John the Baptist on a plate!"

²⁶ This made the king very sad, but he could not refuse her because of the vows he had made in front of all his guests. ²⁷ So he sent off a guard at once with orders to bring John's head. The guard left, went to the prison, and cut John's head off; ²⁸ then he brought it on a plate and gave it to the girl, who gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When John's disciples heard about this, they came and got his body, and buried it.

Ephesians 1: 3-14

³ Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ he has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. ⁴ Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him.

Because of his love ⁵ God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children—this was his pleasure and purpose. ⁶ Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for the free gift he gave us in his dear Son! ⁷ For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, ⁸ which he gave to us in such large measure!

In all his wisdom and insight ⁹ God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. ¹⁰ This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.

¹¹ All things are done according to God's plan and decision; and God chose us to be his own people in union with Christ because of his own purpose, based on what he had decided from the very beginning. ¹² Let us, then, who were the first to hope in Christ, praise God's glory!

¹³ And you also became God's people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised. ¹⁴ The Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people, and this assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are his. Let us praise his glory!

HYMN: Thy kingdom come

If you would like to sing this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment

1 Thy kingdom come, O God,
thy rule, O Christ, begin;
break with thine iron rod
the tyrannies of sin.

2 Where is thy reign of peace
and purity and love?
When shall all hatred cease,
as in the realms above?

3 When comes the promised time
that war shall be no more,
and lust, oppression, crime
shall flee thy face before?

4 We pray thee, Lord, arise,
and come in thy great might;
revive our longing eyes,
which languish for thy sight.

5 O'er lands both near and far
thick darkness broodeth yet:
arise, O Morning Star,
arise, and never set!

Lewis Hensley

SERMON: *Mrs Nancy McOnie*

Our lectionary readings for today are not so much 'A Tale of Two Cities' as a story of two kingdoms – and two very different kings.

It is usually at Christmas that we sing the carol about John the Baptist, the herald who brought glad tidings of the King of Kings. However, at the time of our reading today, John was in prison, mainly because he had spoken out about Herod's marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife.

Herodias was angry with John and was looking for an opportunity to have him put to death; but it seems that Herod, in spite of putting John in prison, did not want him to die. He visited John and liked to listen to him. Corrupt as Herod was, he recognised John as a true

prophet. However a rash promise to Salome, because he wanted to see her dance, led to her asking for the head of John, obviously prompted by Herodias.

Herod felt guilty about John's death, but it did not alter his behaviour nor make him a better king. How different was Herod's kingdom from the kind of kingdom Jesus spoke about: a kingdom of peace and love.

Paul also suffered for his faith and it is probable that the letter to the Ephesians was written when Paul was in Rome – and in prison there. Far from being despondent, Paul wrote with hope and encouragement to the church at Ephesus. He begins by reminding them – and us, readers today – of our dependence on God and how much we already have to thank Him for.

The chapter is headed 'The spiritual blessings in Christ' and Paul makes these very clear in his writing. God has always been there as our God, even before we knew about Him or realised how much He loves us. In fact, God loves us so much that He has made us His children, His sons and daughters. We belong to Him. Because we are His children, He has shared with us His plan for the world: "His secret", as Paul says. It is a plan to bring all Creation together in heaven and on earth, with Christ as the head over all these things.

We belong to God. He has put His mark upon us through the Holy Spirit, which is His gift to us. In view of all this, Paul writes, the only response is one of praise. So, as Christians, we in these days should be living our lives as people who know what God's plan is for the world.

Jane Williams reminds us that we know God has called us to share in His life and love, so we should never forget the Christian calling to joy and hope, to praising and glorifying God. We may remember the words from 'The Westminster Catechism' that the "chief end of human life is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him for ever".

Reading these words and the stories of John and Paul, two of the saints of old, has made me think again about our difficulties in these days of coping with Coronavirus and its restrictions: how are we to live the Christian Life in our world today?

FAITH - Firstly, we need to remember our faith: all that the Bible teaches us about God's love for His children, the secret He has shared with us about His plan for the world, and the many blessings we have received. It is important to give thanks and praise to God even in difficult days.

HOPE - It is also important to express our hope that God is still in control in our world and that all things will work together for good if we trust in Him. There must have been times for both Paul and John when they felt they were losing hope in those dreary prisons, but they remained faithful to the end.

I have chosen for the closing hymn 'All my hope on God is founded': both words and music are very uplifting. There is a story behind its tune, 'Michael'. Herbert Howells, the composer, had just passed through the very sad experience of losing his nine-year-old son through meningitis. It was while he was in mourning that Robert Bridges, who had just completed the translation of the words into English, sent him a copy of the hymn. It is said

that as soon as the composer read these words, he immediately began to compose the tune, which of course he dedicated to his son Michael.

It is important that we should continue to express our hope through our lives today. The king we follow showed us by His example what kind of kingdom we must help to establish: a kingdom founded on love and built up through faith and hope. To this King of Love, we offer our praise and glory.

Amen.

PRAYERS of intercession

Let us pray

Blessed are you, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. You have destined us for the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Father, we give you thanks for John the Baptist and the way in which he stood against an evil regime. We thank you for the gift of your kingdom to us. We rejoice in our freedom and we pray that your church today may reflect your love in the way it cares for the outcast and the needy.

We remember all who are persecuted for their faith or for making a stand against evil. We pray especially for Christians who are seeking to improve corrupt societies and governments.

V. Show us your loving kindness, O Lord,

R. **and grant us your salvation.**

We give thanks for the work of the United Nations and its efforts to bring peace and unity to our world. We pray for all who are caught up in war and violence. We remember those who have lost loved ones and those who do not know where their loved ones are. We ask your blessing on Amnesty International and all who risk their lives for the freedom of others.

V. Show us your loving kindness, O Lord,

R. **and grant us your salvation.**

Father, may our homes reflect the love and unity of your kingdom. Bless our families and friends with the joy of your presence. We ask your love to strengthen all who are in homes where there is oppression and where lives are not valued. We remember all those who are imprisoned by their illness or incapacity and who long for a fuller and richer life.

We pray for members and friends of our own church fellowship, holding in our thoughts those we know who are unwell or who are finding life difficult at this time. We commend them all to God's love and care.

Lord, we pray for the time when your kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. We join our prayers with our loved ones departed and with all your saints. May we one day share with them the joys of your eternal kingdom.

V. Show us your loving kindness, O Lord,

R. **and grant us your salvation.**

We offer these prayers, together with the unspoken prayers of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, **Amen.**

HYMN: All my hope on God is founded

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment*

1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

4 Daily doth th' Almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Joachim Neander, tr Robert Bridges

BLESSING

Let us pray

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with us all, evermore,

Amen.