



Call to worship; Psalm 128 v1-2: 'All you who fear God, how blessed you are! How happily you walk on his smooth straight road.'

Hymn: Singing the Faith 24 – 'Come, now is the time to worship' *Brian Doerksen*

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 chose you now.

Prayers of adoration confession and absolution: we praise and thank God, creator of His world who cares for all, through Jesus whose death and resurrection enables us to have a closer relationship with God as sons and daughters and through the Holy Spirit who guides and inspires us to live lives to the full. We apologise for our shortcomings in worship, for our tendency to act in our own strength without reference to Him. We thank and praise Him that, when we say sorry and turn again to Him, he forgives. We resolve to walk more closely with Him in our lives. *Our Father ...*

Scripture: Mark 12 v38 – Mark 13 v2

Hymn: Singing the Faith 462 – 'Come with me, Come wander' *John Bell & Graham Maule*

Come with me, come wander,
come welcome the world,
where strangers might smile
or where stones might be hurled;
Come leave what you cling to,
lay down what you clutch,
and find, with hands empty,
that hearts can hold much.

*Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!
Sing hey for the Pharisees leaving their rules!
Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!
Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!*

Come walk in my company, come sleep by my side,
come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide;
Come sit at my table and eat with my friends,
discovering that love which the world never ends.

Come share in my laughter, come close to my fears,
come find yourself washed with the kiss of my tears;
Come stand close at hand while I suffer and die
and find in three days that I never will lie.

Come leave your possessions, come share out your
treasure,
come give and receive without method or measure;
Come loose every bond that's resisting the Spirit,
enabling the earth to be yours to inherit.

Message:

Do you ever 'people watch', for example, if you're having a coffee in a pavement cafe, with many people passing by? Or do you find the whole idea intrusive?

In our reading today, we find Jesus and his disciples 'people watching'. They're in the temple in Jerusalem. Prior to this, Jesus has been questioned by Pharisees, Saducees and 'legal minds' – they're seeking evidence to have him arrested. Jesus doesn't oblige, but gives them plenty to reflect on. Perhaps they examine their own lives and standards – or not! The disciples in Mark are on a steep learning curve. They see and learn from Jesus, as he teaches, heals and deals with people. Jesus interprets where they get confused. So what do they see as they all 'people watch'?

People making a great show of placing money into the alms box. Keeping up appearances? Jesus has just delighted the crowd with warnings about the sharp practices of 'entitled people' whose lives are an outward show and act at the expense of others.

'Keeping up appearances'. People can want things to be 'as they should be', and have high expectations for what they would deem 'correct behaviour'. You may remember the comedy series with Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced

'Bouquet') She wants to impress and so often alarms others. Why does she seek status? The result of coming from a dysfunctional family? Maybe we sympathise – or even recognise something behavioural in those we love – or ourselves! Do those making a show of giving, return home to candlelit suppers, in self-congratulatory mood?

But now their people-watching gets more interesting. A poor widow comes along and puts in two small coins – 'her whole livelihood' as Tom Wright says. She gives sacrificially, as Jesus explains to the disciples.

Jesus – 'God Come Down' – isn't fooled by extravagant gestures meaning little. Outward appearances don't resonate – as he tells Samuel before he anoints David in 1 Samuel 16. God looks at what people are like inside. There is a great contrast between the widow and those who have a lot but give away little – not only money but time, use of their talents and active compassion for others. Wealth well used can be transformative in bring the Kingdom closer. Take the example of William Hartley, the founder of Hartley's Jam in Victorian times. A Primitive Methodist, his family were initially alarmed by his ambition – which came about through unreliable sources of jam for his grocery business. Would wealth and ambition take him away from his faith? No, he was fair and honest in prices he charged and the quality of products, using wealth gained to build decent homes for his workforce and striving for their well-being through instituting safe working practices. He was well respected by governments – but towards the end of life, he said: 'I am much exercised as to whether I am a disciple of Jesus Christ that my work people, my business friends, my neighbours and my family can constantly see the Spirit of the Master in my actions'.

We reflect on Jesus' sacrificial and enduring love on the Cross, which his remarks on loving sacrifice point towards. We know that at the heart of church life and witness, it's the life and witness of faith, hope and love in the name of the Gospel which count. Psalm 127 says: 'Unless the Lord build the house, its builders labour in vain'. Our response must be to open ourselves to seeing more as he sees and being more as He wants us to become, in our daily lives as well as spiritually. As the disciples learn that God-Come-Down looks beyond the superficial, so we too need to look deeper, praying that the Holy Spirit takes us beyond our preconceptions and prejudices as we learn to look with the eyes of Jesus at present day world issues. We need to be ready to question Him, and be open to changing our views and actions, in order that the Kingdom is built here and now on firmer foundation in keeping with His plans and will for His people. And this means all people – no-one needs to 'keep up appearances' with the God who loves us, cares for us and wants us to live our lives more with Him at the centre of all we are and do. God through His grace freely given, welcomes all who turn to Him. He wants to know them better, to have relationships built and restored. As Wesley said – all can be saved and all can know they are saved. Let's pray that, this coming Advent, we can ourselves let God reign more in us - and then we shouldn't be surprised what He can do and what can happen through His love and grace!

Prayers of Intercession: we pray for our world, for places of conflict, poverty and injustice; for our family and friends, especially remembering any who are unwell; for our churches, asking for those seeking a renewal or establishment of faith to be welcomed; and for ourselves, bringing our particular prayers to God and asking Him to renew and deepen our vision of the power of His Kingdom.

Collect for the day; God of peace, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all; govern the hearts and minds of those in authority, and bring the families of nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 63 – 'Over all the Earth You Reign on High' *Brenton Brown*

Over all the earth, you reign on high,
every mountain stream every sunset sky.
But my one request, Lord, my only aim,
is that you'd reign in me again.

*Lord, reign in me, reign in your pow'r,
over all my dreams, in my darkest hour.*

*You are the Lord of all I am,
so won't you reign in me again?*

Over every thought, over every word,
may my life reflect the beauty of my Lord;
'cause you mean more to me than any earthly thing,
so won't you reign in me again?

Blessing: Guide and strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may ever work to your praise and glory: and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest and remain with us all and with those we love and care for, this day and forever. Amen.