



'God of the living'

Call to worship

Lord, open our eyes to the wonders of your Word,
that we may encounter the mystery of your presence. **Amen.**

Hymn: StF736 - In heavenly love abiding,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sd7GDDSsvk>

In heavenly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here.
The storm may roar without
me;
My heart may low be laid;
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?

Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh;
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.

Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er
me,
Where the dark clouds have
been.
My hope I cannot measure;
My path to life is free;
My Saviour has my treasure,
And He will walk with me.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Creator God, for times of remembrance, for times of rejoicing, for times of reflection, for times of reunion, **we thank you.**

Silence

Loving God,
for opportunities to worship freely together,
for opportunities to serve you freely together,
for opportunities to question and debate together openly,
for opportunities to make decisions by free will,
we thank you.

Silence

Eternal Lord, for the good news of who Christ is,
for the insights from your living word,
for your promises to us made known in Jesus,
for the gifts of your Holy Spirit, enlivening your Church,
for your eternal love,
for your unlimited graciousness to each and every one of us,
we thank you. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

Almighty God, throughout the week we have been part of all the comings and goings of life.
We have been caught up in the issues of the day, the lead stories, the headlines, the shock horror.
We have set traps for others to walk into. We have been dead to you and only alive to ourselves.
We have denied you by the ways we have lived, by the secret thoughts of our hearts, in small things
as well as large.

Silence

We are truly sorry. Forgive us, we pray. Help us this day and every day to help one another to walk
humbly with you. We ask this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Today's Readings: 2 Thessalonians 2.1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38

Hymn: StF628 Faithful One, so unchanging
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ekqg7XVb8ZY>

Faithful one, so unchanging

Ageless one, you are my rock of peace
Lord of all I depend on you
I call out to you, again and again
I call out to you, again and again

You are my rock in times of trouble

You lift me up when I fall down
All through the storm
Your love is, the anchor
My hope is in You alone

Reflections:

'God of the living'

Grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, it's pleasure to lead this my first digital worship with you. If we haven't met, my name is Abe, appointed to serve the Ipswich Circuit from September 2022. I hope there'll be opportunities to meet some of you in person.

Let us pray,

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, our God, our Redeemer, Amen.

Today, in our Gospel reading, Jesus is having another argument. Jesus is questioned about the resurrection. He explains that God is God of the living, not of the dead, because all people can be eternally alive. But what difference would it make to determine the nature of a legally bound marriage in the afterlife for those who say/believe there is no resurrection?

In the patriarchal culture of the ancient world, it would strike few as odd that these men debate the ownership of this woman in the afterlife: "whose wife will the woman be"? Furthermore, it would strike few as odd that these Jewish men were deliberating the reproductive repercussions of this one woman, a (hypothetical) wife of seven different men.

As in this case, even the absent children were considered in relationship to the male figures of the families: "all seven (men) died childless" (Luke 20:31); "raise up children for his brother" (verse 28). Sadly, but true in all patriarchal societies (ancient and modern), the female body often becomes the place of theological regulation. For this unnamed woman, Torah, the Jewish Holy Book, would determine her earthly relations but could not resolve her future life. And, as we know, the Sadducees had little concern for her future implications because of their theological assumptions.

This passage is one in a series of discussions in which various groups question Jesus' authority. They ask "by what authority are you doing these things?" (Luke 20:3). Jesus answers the question, again, as he does with a parable (20:9-19), which appears to be a clear assault on the Jerusalem leaders who "wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour" (20:19). But they chose not to do so because of Jesus' popularity among the crowds. So, additional "spies" approach Jesus with a question that intimates Jerusalem's relationship to the Roman Empire: should we "pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (20:22) Finally, the Sadducees —attached to the Jerusalem Temple—arrive with their own query.

The question remains. What difference does this argument of this hypothetical woman, and the seven husbands make for a people of faith and what do God's followers expect will happen from their interpretation of this passage?

Key to this passage, I think, is the relationship between "God" and "life": "for God is a God of the living." Legal human relationships, even those bound by holy books, can have no bearing on what happens in the afterlife. Instead, when we read this text, we are called to something that bring life, energy, meaning, and substance to all God's children. The people addressed in 2 Thessalonians, in our first reading, are facing a number of difficulties. They are suffering persecution because they prioritise God's kingdom over the Roman Empire where they occupy (1.5).

They have been disturbed by a message 'that the day of the Lord is already here' (2.2), and some of the communities have abandoned work (3.11). The recipients of 1 Thessalonians worried that some had died before the Lord's coming. And Paul, while reassuring them that the day of the Lord would come soon, also told them that already 'we all belong to the day', and that Christ died for all. Paul is speaking into Jesus' response to this woman, and all faithful, who are "children of the resurrection". In this assurance, is the call for all God's children (Luke 20:36), to live as if their relationships can be expanded, to become like the "angels"; God's messengers in the world, living in God's service.

The call to this service clearly challenges our contemporary notions that 'married' life is the only true fulfilment of a meaningful life. Of course, there are more pressing contemporary theological debates that should take our attention, like the inclusive nature of our congregations toward people of various orientations. What theological beliefs do we still have in place in our congregations that displace and disregard the bodies of people?

The mistreatment of women is not a foreign concept or happens overseas – as recent as a few days ago, I attend a show put on in aid of a Women's Refuge. And it was not so long ago that some of our own cultures and systems here excluded women from important documents such as the Marriage Act of 1949, which excluded mother's names on the register, something denied over centuries, and our tax and national insurance, also treated women unfavourably or as chattels.

In his life affirming answer that God is a "god of the living," then followers of Jesus, ought care about things that bring life, recalling not just what happens when we die "in the resurrection or whose wife will she be?" rather we are to pay attention to present realities as to why we still have theological and familiar systems, that forces women to marry or remarry again and again, so can give birth to protect husband's name or family lines?

Jesus' reply, especially in this season of remembering, offers an alternative, life-affirming perspective on resurrection, not only on women and but on Scripture as a whole. Through baptism, we become members one of another in Christ, children of the resurrection and members of a company of saints whose mutual belonging transcends death. As Charles Wesley wrote:

One family, we dwell in him,
one Church, above, beneath;
though now divided by the stream,
the narrow stream of death.
(Charles Wesley) **Amen.**

And so, in the days leading up to remembering our loved ones, let us pray for our brothers and sisters who have died, that they may enter into eternal life with Jesus.

For the bereaved, that they will find peace and comfort in their faith that they have received.

And finally, for us, that we may always value the worship in which we are united in the communion of saints.
May the Lord, graciously hear our prayer. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

God of truth and justice, we pray for our world,
and where those in need are often disregarded
God of truth and justice, we pray that your kingdom will be made known
among us and through us; that your Spirit will point to a better way of living.
We pray for those with influence – may those who lead remember the lost and the least,
and may those who proclaim your name do so with integrity and compassion.
May the risen Jesus, be our way, our truth and our life;
in our world, in our community, in your church, in our lives, in this world and the next. **Amen.**

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us! Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer – Contemporary

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Final Hymn StF 645 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ekqg7XVb8ZY>

*Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?*

Refrain:

***We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!***

*Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rage, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow?
[Refrain]*

*Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]*

*Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore? [Refrain]*

Blessing:

May the comfort of God surround you;
the strength of God invigorates you;
the grace of God enliven you
in the name of the Creator,
the Saviour and the Comforter. **Amen.**