



Call: Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name.

Prayer: We come into your presence, glorious Lord of heaven and earth, to worship and adore you. Empower us by your Holy Spirit that we may worship you as you deserve, with joy and reverence, in spirit and in truth; for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ who came to be Saviour of all. AMEN

Hymn : Jesus shall reign STF328

Watch on Youtube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcxdvJy_t_8

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does his successive journeys run;
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

For him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head;
his name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song;
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns;
the prisoner leaps to lose his chains;
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who are in want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring
its grateful honours to our King;
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) LM

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Prayer: God who created the heavens and the earth, you are source of our life. When we forsake you, you seek us out. When we return to you, you are gentle and merciful. Your Son came to be a Light to the nations, but we walked in darkness. He came to open eyes that are blind, but we failed to see him in the neighbours from whom we turn aside. Forgive us we pray. Your Son came to be our Saviour, taking your perfect nature upon himself. Yet he was baptized by John, identifying himself with us sinners, not turning aside from humankind but meeting us in our need. He shared our death on the Cross and was raised by your mighty power. Through baptism and the Holy Spirit, we are born again in him. Baptized into his death, we have victory over death through him. United with him in a resurrection like his, we rejoice in the glorious hope that we shall live with him forever. To him, with you and your life-giving Spirit be all honour and glory, now and forever. AMEN

LORDS PRAYER

The bible readings set for today move through the Old Testament promise of redemption for the nation of Israel as the servant of God, God's chosen people, to Jesus as the Servant of God and then via witnesses to his ministry, to the proclamation of the gospel message to all people.

In the Order of Communion there is often used the Nicene Creed, or the Apostles Creed. I have included the latter as it mentions the holy catholic church – meaning the universal church, available to all, in every part of the world.

Take a moment to either listen to a spoken version or to read and reflect on the words and what they mean to you.

Hymn: Apostles Creed – I believe in God (this creed) – Hillsong
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPEZDiWzaKo>

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.

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9

Acts 10: 34-43

Hymn: Speak O Lord STF 161 Watch on Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=my90e3a_nlM

Speak O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your church is built
as the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (born 1974) and Stuart Townend (born 1963)

Message: **God's mercy is for all**

I enjoy reading, especially a novel that engages my imagination and draws me into the story. It doesn't have to be a long book, nor does it have to be action packed.

The bible readings for today take us from the times of the exile in Babylon, where everything appeared to have gone wrong, to the restoration of God's people and the fulfilment of God's covenant promise, and beyond to new people in new places, and up to the present day. It's a story that is summed up in the lines of the creed, a declaration of what the church teaches and Christians together, believe. It binds people of different races, traditions, languages, and from different parts of the world together as a universal community of faith, irrespective of social standing or intellectual level.

God's gracious love has spread from one race, in one country, from an exclusive group of people, to anyone and everyone who will receive it.

So, let's look back at the beginning of the story.

The book of Isaiah was written to the nation of Israel, foretelling that they would suffer God's judgement in exile. They had been a nation, chosen by God, given the mission of serving God, guarding his word and to be a light to the gentile world. However, they had repeatedly rebelled and turned away from God. Hence, the exile into Babylon.

We pick up the story when Isaiah is prophesying the restoration of the nation and return of the people to their homeland. The verses we read are a direct link to the gospel reading set for today. Matthew describes the baptism of Jesus, by John in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descending, and the voice of God saying "This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Like in any good book, every detail is there for a reason. The early Christians, saw the words in Isaiah applying to Jesus. These were the words spoken as Jesus was baptised, affirming his ministry on earth. It was a covenant promise to the people, that he would send the Messiah to bring justice to the world.

The tone of Isaiah's writing was of gentleness, encouragement, justice and truth; and that mission would not falter or be discouraged, something the people of Jesus time failed to appreciate.

When Jesus came, the people expected something different, despite evidence in the Old Testament scripture to the contrary. The Jews were expecting a violent uprising against the Roman oppressors. They were expecting a king to overthrow the ruling Herod of the day.

Jesus' mission, however, was done differently, quietly without violence.

Jesus came as the Messiah. He came as the Servant King. He came as fulfilment of God's covenant promise. He was God's chosen one and the Holy Spirit empowered him. Jesus' message was one of peace and of justice, for the poor, for the sick, for the unclean, for the outcast.

This came as a bit of a shock to the people. This was not what they expected. It made them feel very uncomfortable. It made them feel angry. It made them want to kill Jesus. And that is what they did – they hung him on a cross, (Acts 10:39). For the Jews to be hung from a tree meant that you were cursed – indeed, this is what Judas did after he betrayed Jesus.

Yet Jesus was resurrected to new life from death on that cross. God had not cursed him, he delighted in him. This was the divine fulfilment of his mission on earth.

And so, we come, almost, to the final part of our story today. Peter, a witness to that death and to the resurrection, comes to meet with a man in Caesarea. This man was a Roman, an army officer – a centurion – just the sort of person Jesus intended.

God's grace and mercy is not just for a small group of religious elite in one small corner of the world. Caesarea was in Samaria; a place no self-respecting Jew would visit. The man represented all that the Jews hated – Roman oppression by armed forces. Yet it was specifically to him that Peter was sent.

God's grace and mercy is for all, irrespective of race, culture, language, geography, social status or intellectual ability. God has no favourites.

So how does this speak to us?

Peter was a Jew by birth. He had grown up observing the many strict rules, many of them around food, its preparation and consumption. He was mixing with someone who was unclean, impure and who had completely different ideas around food. This probably would have made Peter feel extremely uncomfortable. Yet Peter declares that God welcomes all, he does not choose one above the rest. Also, it's not about rituals and traditions. It's simply about those who "fear God", that is those who love God, and it's about loving others – by doing good .

It does not matter about the rituals and traditions. There may be things that we cling on to, that by letting go of them we feel "out of our comfort zone". But remember, for others, perhaps for newcomers, those traditions and rituals that we hold so dearly might be a barrier for them coming to know Jesus.

We might think we are special, Methodists, Anglicans, United Reformed, Baptists, Catholics and many other denominations. Yet we worship the same God, possibly in different ways.

The message for me in Peter's encounter with the centurion, is that Peter did not try and impose his religious practices on the man. He had been told in the vision that it didn't matter about pure or impure, clean or unclean. What was important, was that this man was "God fearing", he was searching and God was tasking Peter with taking the gospel message to him, making it accessible to him.

So, we are tasked with meeting people where they are, and bringing the gospel message of a gracious and merciful God. It might make us feel very uncomfortable, it might go against everything we've been used to, but God can and wants to use us.

This is the conclusion of the story brought to us through the bible today, the creed that holds this all together, the universal church. This is the message, the thread that has run throughout the story – that no one is beyond God's mercy. Let us go out into the world, to meet with those who are searching, to break down the barriers, and to show them that God's love is for all. AMEN

Intercessions:

Gracious and merciful Lord, we pray for your church throughout the world. We give thanks for the diversity embraced within your church. Help us to bring your gospel message to others, to break down any barriers that we have created within ourselves or within the church preventing those who are searching coming to know you.

We pray for a world where violence and hatred abound. We long for your ways of justice and peace, for tolerance and acceptance, for people to celebrate diversity rather than fighting against it.

We pray for those known to us who do not yet know you, that they will find you and come to know you as their loving Saviour. We pray for those known to us who are suffering in body , mind or spirit, that they, too can know your healing touch.

We pray for ourselves that we can put aside differences, and be willing to move outside our comfort zones, in order to live and serve as you have us do.

In the name of Jesus Christ, the humble servant and one true King. AMEN

Hymn: From heaven you came STF 272 Watch on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4FtZ9XzZag>

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| 1 | 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.
<i>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.</i> | <i>Refrain</i> |
| 2 | 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. | 3 |
| | | Come see His hands and His feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice;
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.
<i>Refrain</i> |
| | | 4 |
| | | So let us learn how to serve,
and in our lives enthrone Him;
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.
<i>Refrain</i> |

Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

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Blessing: Send us out into your world to serve, and in our lives may we enthrone Jesus, the Servant King. May we live to serve others, acknowledging their needs, and in doing so serve Christ. **AMEN**