

Father's Day



Call to Worship – Come let us worship God, the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

Hymn - STF 25 – God is here! As we his people

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t8y02Vj1Eo>

- 1 God is here! As we his people meet to offer praise and prayer, may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share. Here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts wait the coming of the Spirit into open minds and hearts.
- 2 Here are symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace; here are table, font, and pulpit; here the cross has central place. Here in honesty of preaching, here in silence, as in speech, here, in newness and renewal, God the Spirit comes to each.
- 3 Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd's flock and fold, here as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us, as of old. Here the servants of the Servant seek in worship to explore what it means in daily living to believe and to adore.
- 4 Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom, in an age of change and doubt, keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your purpose out. Here, in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive: we, who cannot live without you, we adore you! We believe!

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

Prayer

We lift up our hands, voices, hearts and with them our lives.

Search us, O God, and bring us deeper into the justice of your life-giving Word.

Call us, O God, into knowing more of life – your Word is life, so may we find life with each other.

We rejoice in your never-failing invitation to celebrate and engage with your welcome. Amen.

A prayer of Confession

Scripture: 1 Samuel 15: 34 – 16: 13 and Mark 4 26 - 34

Reflection

A good deal has happened since the Israelite elders asked Samuel for a king.

Saul was identified and anointed, but his kingship turned out to be unsatisfactory. The long saga of the books of Samuel and Kings has a single criterion for evaluating the success of kingship: is the king wholeheartedly committed to worshipping Israel's one God, who is identified as his Father (Psalm 2:7)? Because Saul does not live up to this, especially over his treatment of the Amalekites after victory in battle (see chapter 15), God withdraws favour and the search for a new king is on.

Samuel, at home in Ramah near Bethlehem, mourns the end of his relationship with Saul, and God too is sorry. Saul's shortcomings as leader grieve them both; the narrative does not address the wider theological questions about why God chose Saul and why this calling broke down. The pause to mark this sorrow is only brief, and the story moves on – change is urgently needed.

For Samuel, Bethlehem was just another insignificant place in Judea. Its fame arose from what he would do there: anoint David as king. Its resonance in Christian tradition also arises from this anointing – Jesus, Son of David, was born in David's hometown. Samuel's action changed human history in the short- and long-term.

Samuel's arrival in Bethlehem alarmed the elders – was he coming to challenge them? His reassurance was in line with God's advice (v.2) but did not reveal the real purpose of his visit. It is not clear whether Jesse is one of the community's leaders; in any case, his status is not relevant alongside the overwhelming reality of God's choice. This is reiterated with the rejection of one son after another, all fine young men who might, in Samuel's eyes, have been suitable. They shared a handsome appearance with Saul, but this was no longer relevant to God's purposes.

The choice eventually fell on David, the last-born. He was still a boy (17:33; cf 3:1), and an eighth son in a society that recognised seven as the 'perfect' number. He had the menial task of keeping the sheep, though this also recalls the lifestyle of Abraham and Moses. This focus on his insignificance fits in a pattern of unexpected choices: why was Jacob chosen over his older brother, or Joseph over his brothers? Change for the better flows from God's initiative, not human preference; and so David was anointed with oil and received the spirit of the Lord.

Today's passage from the Gospel of Mark contains two very characteristic elements of Jesus' teaching: the kingdom of God and parables. The first is an enigmatic term that Jesus often uses in the gospels. Indeed, he begins his public ministry in Mark's Gospel by proclaiming that the "kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). We might understand it as meaning something like 'the place ruled by God'. However, this kingdom is not limited in time or space and is a concept that we may never understand fully: it is a 'mystery' or 'secret' (Mark 4:11).

In describing this enigmatic concept, Jesus used an enigmatic way of speaking: parables. Contemporaries of Jesus used this way of speaking too but, as we see here (vs 33-34), Jesus seems to have used them so often that they became intimately connected with his ministry. These are not just simple stories for children with a single meaning, though. They are metaphors, proverbs, riddles and more. Parables are meant to challenge their listeners and, like the Kingdom of God, their meaning can often be mysterious.

The two parables quoted here use horticultural metaphors, following on from the famous parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20). The first (vs 26-29) is a rare example of a story that is unique to Mark. Like many parables, it contains someone acting slightly oddly, in this case a farmer who simply sows his seeds and then lets them grow without any further involvement. The second (vs 30-32), which by contrast we find in all three gospels, again refers to seeds. This time it is the seeds of the black mustard plant (*Brassica nigra*), which can grow up to three metres tall but whose seeds are minute.

These parables, along with most of chapter 4 in Mark's Gospel, form part of the first major block of Jesus' teaching. God bless you all as you learn from Christ. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hymn – STF 397 - The Spirit lives to set us free

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDcbYk-9C-Y>

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| <p>1 The Spirit lives to set us free,
walk, walk in the light;
he binds us all in unity,
walk, walk in the light.
<i>Walk in the light, walk in the light,
walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.</i></p> <p>2 Jesus promised life to all,
walk, walk in the light;
the dead were wakened by his call,
walk, walk in the light.</p> <p>3 He died in pain on Calvary,
walk, walk in the light;
to save the lost like you and me,
walk, walk in the light.</p> | <p>4 We know his death was not the end,
walk, walk in the light;
he gave his Spirit to be our friend,
walk, walk in the light.</p> <p>5 By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,
walk, walk in the light;
the Father's kindness is revealed,
walk, walk in the light.</p> <p>6 The Spirit lives in you and me,
walk, walk in the light;
his light will shine for all to see,
walk, walk in the light.</p> |
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Damian Lundy (1944–1996)

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Blessing

The blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be with you and those you love, this day and for ever more. **Amen**