



Call to Worship - Psalm 111:1-4

Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures for ever. He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate.

Hymn - 127 - Sing to the great Jehovah's praise <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xun5pD8Url>

Sing to the great Jehovah's praise;
All praise to him belongs;
Who kindly lengthens out our days
Demands our choicest songs.

His providence has brought us through
Another various year;
We all with vows and anthems new
Before our God appear.

Father, thy mercies past we own,
Thy still continued care;
To thee presenting, through thy Son,

Whate'er we have or are.

Our lips and lives shall gladly show
The wonders of thy love,
While on in Jesus' steps we go
To see thy face above.

Our residue of days or hours
Thine, wholly thine, shall be,
And all our consecrated powers
A sacrifice to thee.

Charles Wesley -1707-1788

Prayer : God our Father, today we come in Worship, thankfully and expectantly. We know that you are here with us as you have been with your people always.

We lean on you for safety, we rely on you for guidance, and we trust you for wisdom. We pray that you will accept our praises and this act of devotion for we adore you.

We pray, in silence, calling to mind the special things in this past week for which we are truly thankful.

And we confess our sin too.

Take and transform us:

Holy God, take and transform us. We confess we have lived carelessly, frittering our days away. Renew us, Lord, in wisdom, And keep us from slipping into evil ways.

We confess that we have acted foolishly, paying little heed to your instruction. Renew us, Lord, in understanding, And strengthen us to put your will into practice.

We confess that we have chosen wantonly, ploughing our resources into passing pleasures. Renew us, Lord, in the riches of your Spirit, And focus us for your work and witness.

Holy God, Take our croaky voices, our hesitant hearts, And by your redeeming love transform us Until our lives become a hymn to your grace and glory.

Dominic Grant ©The United Reformed Church

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 - 520 - Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HSCDvagn0s>

Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart
and a discerning mind;
give, as I play the Christian's part,
the strength to finish what I start
and act on what I find.

By your divine and urgent claim,
and by your human face,
kindle our sinking hearts to flame,
and as you teach the world your name
let it become your place.

When, in the rush of days, my will
is habit-bound and slow,
help me to keep in vision still
what love and power and peace can fill
a life that trusts in you.

Jesus, with all your Church I long
to see your kingdom come:
show me your way of righting wrong
and turning sorrow into song
until you bring me home.

Caryl Micklem (1925-2003)

Readings : 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 and John 6:51-58

Hymn - 500 - Happy are they who find the grace <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g2SyzZpL0w>

Happy are they who find the grace,
the blessing of God's chosen race,
the wisdom coming from above,
the faith that sweetly works by love.

Her hands are filled with length of days,
true riches, and immortal praise,
riches of Christ, on all bestowed,
and honour that descends from God.

Happy beyond description we,
who say 'the Saviour died for me,'
the gift unspeakable obtain,
and heavenly understanding gain.

To purest joys she all invites,
chaste, holy, spiritual delights;
her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her flowery paths are peace.

Wisdom divine! Who tells the price
of wisdom's costly merchandise?
Wisdom to silver we prefer,
and gold is dross compared to her.

Happy are they who wisdom gain,
thrice happy who his guest retain;
they own, and shall for ever own,
wisdom, and Christ, and heaven are one.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Sermon - Enhancing Worship (1 Kings 3:3)

Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

Introduction : A couple of weeks ago, the BBC Sunday Morning Service on Radio Four was a recording made at this year's Keswick Convention. On the same Sunday that a great crowd worshipped in the glorious surroundings of the Lake District, others of us will have worshipped in traditional churches and chapels across the country.

If we look back, I wonder how many of us can identify a special act of worship that has a permanent place in our memory. Furthermore, if we were to compare notes I wonder if there would be many similarities.

Aim : Reflecting on Solomon's relationship with worship and with God, let us ask ourselves if what we do is satisfying our need to worship meaningfully.

Worship for David and Solomon : King David, Solomon's father, had sought to move the centre of worship to Jerusalem but God had resisted the building of a fixed Temple there, something that was not to happen until Solomon was King.

There were four key places for worship in David's time, each with its own significance but nevertheless all were important.

Shiloh, Jerusalem, Araunah, Gibeon

Meanwhile in Israel and other near Eastern cultures, there were other, elevated sites often on hilltops that were used for religious practices. There was some symbolism in this:

Closer to the Divine, Central locations, They merged traditions together, They were also social and political gathering points so while being accessible they could lead to mixed messaging.

As his father's life ended, it was to these high places that the twenty year old Solomon went for his worship experiences. Indeed, later and after the temple was built, Solomon still went to these high places where he worshiped indiscriminately.

Strict adherents to the Mosaic Law may be critical but...

Solomon and God

It is true that at the end of his reign, the wheels came off and ended tragically when he worshipped other gods.

In our reading, God appeared to Solomon in a dream at Gibeon and there followed the account of the extraordinary wisdom, which was God's gift to him, not least because he did not ask for the material things or personal longevity that would have been a natural human response. The reading explains that Solomon already was a good operator, but God's blessing would lift him to a new level.

He was a great king and obedient to God for years until, as I said, things went wrong as his humanity got the better of him.

Overcoming the godlessness in us all

Life is one big struggle to live the right way and the more temptations come at us the harder it is to resist. But God knows that, and always has known it. In response to what he knows about our nature, God developed a plan that involved sending Jesus to live alongside us and then to take obedience to a new level in sacrificing himself on a cross on a hill.

His death was sacrificial and in giving himself to it he made a new promise, unbreakable unlike the resolve of Solomon's wisdom. He alone could satisfy our desperate need to get close to God and his blood, at its shedding, cancelled out our false starts, faults, foibles and follies.

There is one thing we need to aspire to share with Solomon. He was wise enough to know that alone he was not sufficiently wise to cope with the enormity of the task ahead of him. Are we wise enough to admit that nothing ordinary can ever sate our desire for the peace of mind that comes from knowing that the future can be all right?

That brings us back to how, where and why we worship and therein lies the problem, for as long as that worship is our own design, construction and delivery.

Summary

However hard we try, whatever efforts we make to provide all inclusive worship or to proclaim a message that is universally acceptable and understandable, while it remains about the experience we have, the place we have it or the style in which we do it, it stands no more than an even chance of success.

There is only one totally satisfying route to God that will not grow stale and that is to share in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Across the ecclesiastical spectrum we have different interpretations of what happens in an act of Holy Communion but in the end whether you believe in Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation or a Memorial Meal, in the Sacrament the communicant gains access to Grace which alone begins a journey that is wholly satisfying because it has little to do with us and much to do with Christ.

Amen.

Hymn - 252 - Jesus the Lord said, I am the bread <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-I-OV28 Fs>

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the bread,
the Bread of Life for the world am I.
The Bread of Life for the world am I,
the Bread of Life for the world am I'.
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,
the Bread of Life for the world am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the vine,
the true and fruitful vine am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the way,
The true and living way am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the light,
the one true light of the world am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,
the Resurrection and the Life am I'.

Anonymous Urdu translated Dermott Monahan (1906-57) v.1, 3-5 and Compilers of Rejoice and Sing v.2

Dedication of Offerings : Generous God, as we have received from you so we bring back a part of what we have; we offer our monetary gifts, our time and talents in the work of your Church and pray that through us your work continues to prosper, for Jesus's sake, Amen.

Prayers of Intercession : Holy Wisdom, you granted Solomon's request for an understanding mind and the knowledge to discern good from evil. Fill us with such understanding and knowledge that we may act as instruments of your loving desire for creation, working with you to transform our conceit into concern for others, our fear into love, our violence into peace, and our brokenness into wholeness. Amen.

Friends in Christ, God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbours as ourselves, we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of the church and the world.

Hear our prayers, God of power, and through the ministry of your Son free us from the grip of the tomb, that we may desire you as the fullness of life and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

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Hymn - 568 - Alleluia, sing to Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJDWFYIkBns>

Alleluia, sing to Jesus!
his the sceptre, his the throne;
Alleluia, his the triumph,
his the victory alone:
hark, the songs of peaceful Sion
thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus out of every nation
hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia, not as orphans
are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia, he is near us,
faith believes, nor questions how:
though the cloud from sight received him,
when the forty days were o'er,
shall our hearts forget his promise,
'I am with you evermore'?

William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

Alleluia, bread of angels,
thou on earth our food, our stay;
Alleluia, here the sinful
flee to thee from day to day:
Intercessor, Friend of sinners,
earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the sinless
sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia, King eternal,
thee the Lord of lords we own;
Alleluia, born of Mary,
earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne:
thou within the veil hast entered,
robed in flesh, our great High Priest;
thou on earth both Priest and Victim
in the eucharistic feast.

The Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.