



## Call to Worship

O Giver of all good gifts, how delicious your words are, so good in our mouths, sweeter than honey!  
Your word is a lamp to our feet, a light to our path gladdening our eyes and showing the way.  
Incline our hearts to keep all your commands to treasure your words forever, to the end. Amen

**Hymn: 161 Speak O Lord** <https://youtu.be/OzAIHlyPgU>

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  
and the earth is filled with your glory.

*Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)*

## Let us pray together

Ever-speaking God your strong words called worlds into being, you spoke light out of darkness, life out of emptiness, beauty out of chaos, you still speak. We praise and worship you.

Ever-speaking God you are the eternal Word, Jesus, God's 'Yes' to us. You have the words of eternal life. You spoke, and lives changed, bodies healed, hearts quickened, you still speak. We praise and worship you.

Ever-speaking God you are the Spirit who brings words to life. You continue to pray for us when the words run out. You speak in the world and in our hearts, you call words to mind and teach us, leading us into truth.

You still speak. We praise and worship you. In this time may we drink in your Word, feast on your Word, hold on to your Word. **Amen**

Faithful God your words give life, forgive us when our words damage and discourage.

Your words bring peace, forgive us when our words stir up anger and discord.

Your words reveal truth, forgive us when our words flatter and falsify.

Your words bring healing, forgive us when our words harm and hurt.

Jesus who spoke out against oppression and hypocrisy, forgive our complicit silence.

Jesus who stood in holy silence before power and violence, forgive the wild words we should not have spoken.

In the quiet of our hearts, may we hear the word of grace. Jesus Christ speaks: 'Your sins are forgiven'.  
Thanks be to God. **Amen**

**Scripture** John 6: 56-69

**Hymn: 395 Spirit of the living God,** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DtJgaGRav4>

Spirit of the living God,  
fall afresh on me.  
Spirit of the living God,  
Fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me,  
mold me, fill me.  
Spirit of the living God,  
fall afresh on me.

**Reflection:**

This will be my final service as the superintendent minister in the Ipswich Circuit. Hopefully, by the time you are reading this, Karen and I will be settled in our new home in Dereham. I have hardly kept this a secret, that my first intention was to retire this summer, put my feet up and have a well-earned rest. The trouble that sometimes God has other plans, I found my sabbatical last year unbearable and the thought of not working didn't feel like an option, so I decided that I would continue for another five years, but definitely not as a superintendent. Of course, in the end God knew better, and I am taking up the appointment as Superintendent of the Central Norfolk Circuit.

When Jesus is talking with his disciples in our bible reading today, we are told that the teaching of Jesus is too difficult for some of them to understand. For those of us who have around Church for a long time, we are used to the reference to eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood each time we share if Holy Communion, so when we read the first four verses of this passage, they perhaps don't present us with too much of a problem. We forget that the disciples were hearing all of this for the first time, what were they to make of it? What was Jesus talking about, this sounds a bit like cannibalism, is it any wonder that the disciples found this teaching hard, too hard for them to comprehend.

We aren't very far into the Gospel story when this happens, Jesus had called the disciples to be the ones who would change the world, who would be "fishers of men" these ordinary working men had been hand picked to do God's work and recognizing that this teaching was too tough for them to handle Jesus gives them an opportunity to walk away. Some of the other disciples turned back and chose not to go any further with him. I love the moment when he turns to the twelve "do you want to turn back too?" he asks. Peter's response is telling "where else can we turn?" he asks, "the only way we know is your way" (or words to that effect).

As I reflect on my own calling, there have been times when my ministry has been tough, I remember just before my ordination that somebody said that they believed that I was doing what I was always meant to do. I have clung to that thought and it has kept me going through some very tough times. The last few years have been particularly tough as I have needed to deal with the challenges of Covid and there have been times when I could cheerfully have walked away from all of this. EXCEPT, like the disciples of old, at those moments I think "but where else would I go?" "Who else would I turn to?" I get myself frustrated with the world today, there seems to be so much that is wrong, and I have found myself over the last few weeks in particular wondering "who can we trust anymore?" Difficult as the teaching of Jesus is and challenging as it is to walk in his way, I can see not alternative that makes sense to me.

The current Methodist year is coming to its close and as the Ipswich Circuit turns the corner into the 2024-25 year it will not be without its challenges.

*Consider*

- *How difficult do you find it when you read passages of scripture that you find challenge you.*
  - *Does this cause you to question your faith?*
  - *Or do you search for a deeper understanding?*
  - *Who do you turn to when you struggle with your faith?*
- *Recognizing that we struggle sometimes with our journey of faith, particularly when times get tough.*

- *How ready are we to talk with others about our difficulties?*
- *Are we ready to listen to the experiences of others?*
- *Do we see it as being an admission of weakness if we ask for help?*
- *We talk about being a Servant Church, what do we do to serve the most vulnerable in our communities?*

**Take time to sit quietly and pray:**

Holy God, you want us to know and believe that you alone are God. Give to your Church such confidence in you that we may do and dare much in your name. We remember those congregations we are connected with and those fellowships we are part of and commend them to your grace.

Jesus Christ, we know and believe that you are truly the Saviour of the World. Grant to the peoples of the world justice and peace. Give wisdom to those with power and freedom to those who are oppressed. We remember those nations and situations which are on our hearts at this time and we ask for your restoration and grace.

Tender-hearted God, we know and believe the love that you have for us and all people. Grant us to draw close and find grace to help us in our time of need. Touch those who we know are struggling with your compassion and comfort, your healing and strength. We remember those who are sick, sorrowful, bereaved or troubled and place them in your loving hands.

Merciful God, who knows our needs and our fears, steady us for all that lies ahead, strengthen our hearts, lead us into your truth, until we see you face to face. **Amen**

*The Lord's Prayer: Our Father .....*

**Hymn: 662 I, the Lord of sea and sky,** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zr9SMm1gII>

I, the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard my people cry.

*Here I am, Lord. ....*

All who dwell in dark and sin  
my hand will save.

I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will send the poor and lame.

I, who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.

I will set a feast for them.  
My hand will save.

Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?

Finest bread I will provide  
till their hearts be satisfied.

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?*

I will give my life to them.

*I have heard you calling in the night.*

Whom shall I send?

*I will go, Lord, if you lead me.*

*Here I am, Lord. ....*

*I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have borne my people's pain.

I have wept for love of them.  
They turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone,  
give them hearts for love alone.

I will speak my words to them.  
Whom shall I send?

**Blessing**

May the words we have heard and prayed and shared echo in our minds, stay in our hearts and re-shape our lives. May we know the Living Word of God with us now and always. **Amen**