



Call to Worship - Isaiah 55:1 : Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Hymn - 132 - O God, our help in ages past

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzP4sn3zPe4>

O God, our help in ages past,
 our hope for years to come,
 our shelter from the stormy blast,
 and our eternal home.

Under the shadow of thy throne
 thy saints have dwelt secure;
 sufficient is thine arm alone,
 and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood
 or earth received her frame,
 from everlasting thou art God,

to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
 are like an evening gone,
 short as the watch that ends the
 night
 before the rising sun.

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
 with all their cares and fears,
 are carried downward by the
 flood,
 and lost in following years.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
 bears all its sons away;
 they fly forgotten, as a dream
 dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
 our hope for years to come,
 be thou our guard while life shall
 last,
 and our eternal home.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Prayer : God our Father, we come to worship you today in a service filled with thoughts about encounters with you.

Generous and gracious God, we praise you that you call the thirsty to the waters and invite the empty-handed to receive from your abundance. You are the giver of life, the source of mercy, and the One whose love cannot be bought, earned or exhausted. We adore you for the free gift of your grace.

We come to reflect on the challenges of our relationship with you: the questions we carry, the struggles we know, and the ways in which faith is sometimes formed in the dark. Yet we come also in the context of grace: your grace which meets us, reforms us, and renews those who come to you in trust.

Lord, as we worship you now, be with us. Help us to meet you and to know that we have met you; not necessarily because every answer has been given, but because your presence has made us different.

Let us pray to the eternal God with our songs and music. We praise you in our worship services. We thank you for the music that moves us and the words that edify us. May the hymns that accompany us into everyday life continue to inspire us. Inspire the musicians when they play in worship. Fill our hearts with beautiful hymns. Give new composers heavenly melodies and gospel words. So may our praises join those of your heavenly court. May they sing of your greatness, your love and your faithfulness. Alleluia.

Ulrich Rusen Weinhold, Secretary for International Relationships, United Protestant Church of France © The Methodist Church

We bring our prayer of confession, knowing that our lives, like Jacob's, are often filled with struggles and strivings. We confess the deviousness of our hearts, the times when we seek blessing only for ourselves, and the anxiety we feel when we must face those we have wronged.

Forgive us, Lord. In your forgiveness, bring an end to our anxiety and consternation. Let us know the real freedom, new hope and better future that come from your mercy.

Bless our time of worship, we pray. May everything we do here be an act that brings glory to your name; for the sake of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray using his prayer:

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.

Psalms 17:1-7, 15 (Responsive) : Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.

From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right.

If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.

My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words.

Wonderfully show your steadfast love, O saviour of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Introduction to theme - When God comes : Where we began – Isaiah 55:1: When God comes, God comes with generous invitation: the thirsty, empty-handed and needy are welcomed and enabled to partake fully and without cost in the life-giving gifts God offers. There are no blockages that create 'have-nots' in God's Kingdom where all can have. God meets different people in different ways, times and places that are appropriate for them. Psalm 17:1-7, 15: God may come as listener, judge and refuge: hearing honest prayer, seeing what is right, showing steadfast love, and satisfying those who long to behold God's face. Genesis 32:22-31: God meets people in struggle as well as comfort: Jacob met God in a night of wrestling, was wounded and blessed, and received a new identity. Romans 9:1-5: Paul reflects on God's coming in covenant faithfulness: he remembers Israel's gifts, promises and calling, culminating in the Messiah. Matthew 14:13-21: When God comes in Christ, compassion becomes practical abundance: Jesus heals, feeds the hungry crowd, and turns little into more than enough. This is a prayer of many people now and it was manifest in reality as people were fed in a miracle in Jesus earthly ministry.

Hymn - 466 - Have faith in God, my heart

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

Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
each promise he has made.

Have faith in God, my soul,
his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.

Have faith in God, my mind,
though oft your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan
than you can fully know.

Lord Jesus, make me whole;
grant me no resting place,
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,
the captive of your grace.

Bryn Austin Rees (1911-1983) © Alexander Scott

Readings : Genesis 32:22-31, Romans 9:1-5 and Matthew 14:13-21

Hymn - 254 - Seek ye first the kingdom of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFxZeY2D5tc>

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto
you. Allelu, alleluia.

Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Allelu, alleluia.

Ask and it shall be given unto you,
seek and you shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened up
to you. Allelu, alleluia.

Karen Lafferty (born 1948) © 1972 CCCM Music/Maranatha! Music

Sermon – Results (Genesis 32:28) Then the man said, ‘You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.’

Introduction : Our theme today is “When God comes”. Isaiah imagines God coming with an invitation that sounds almost too generous to be true: come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. The psalmist looks for God to come as listener, judge and refuge, and longs to awake satisfied by seeing God’s face. Paul, in Romans, is wrestling inwardly with the mystery that Israel has received so much and yet many do not recognise the fulfilment of God’s promise in Christ. And in Matthew, God comes in Jesus with compassion that becomes bread in hungry hands. But in Genesis 32 God comes in one of the strangest and most searching ways of all: not first as answer, comfort, food or clarity, but as a mysterious man in the night. Jacob is alone at the Jabbok.

He has sent his family, servants and possessions ahead, partly to protect them, partly to prepare for meeting Esau, and perhaps partly because there are some things no one else can face for us.

Behind him lies a lifetime of struggle; before him lies Esau, the brother he wronged. In that place of fear, memory and uncertainty, Jacob wrestles until daybreak. The result is a wound, a blessing and a new name: “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel.”

1. When God comes, he meets us truthfully

Who was the man Jacob wrestled with? The story deliberately leaves some mystery. He is called “a man”, yet Jacob names the place Peniel because he says, “I have seen God face to face.” Later readers have spoken of an angel, a theophany, or even a foreshadowing of the Word who would one day take flesh in Jesus Christ.

A theophany is a visible or recognisable appearance of God to human beings, usually in a form they can bear. This matters because later, when Moses asks to see God’s glory, he is warned that no one can see God fully and live. Perhaps the exact category matters less than the result: Jacob discovers that God has come to him personally, bodily, unavoidably.

This encounter begins with truth. “What is your name?” the man asks. Jacob must say “Jacob” — the heel-grabber, the struggler, the one whose life has often been marked by grasping, bargaining and outmanoeuvring others.

He has struggled with Esau before birth and at birth, with Isaac for the blessing, with Laban over wives, wages and flocks, and now with God. When God comes, he does not simply confirm the false self we have built. He brings us to the truth of who we have been, so that he can bless who we are becoming.

2. When God comes, striving becomes prayer

Is it right to strive with God? If strive simply means angry resistance against God’s will, then no. But here the word carries more than fighting. It suggests contending, holding on, persevering, refusing to let go until blessing is received. Jacob does not defeat God by strength; he prevails by clinging. His victory is dependence. He comes out limping, not boasting.

We may know something of this in ordinary life. A person sitting beside a hospital bed, waiting for news; a family trying to repair a relationship; someone carrying a decision they cannot easily make. They may not be “fighting God”, but they are certainly wrestling — praying, questioning, waiting, holding on. And sometimes faith is simply this: not letting go of God in the dark.

This is close to prayer at its deepest. The psalmist cries, “Hear a just cause, O Lord,” and longs to see God’s face. Paul, too, is striving inwardly in Romans 9: his sorrow is not unbelief but love stretched before God.

Faith is not always calm. Sometimes it argues, weeps, waits, asks, and holds on in the dark. The question is not whether we ever struggle with God, but whether our struggle turns us towards God or away from him.

3. When God comes, the result is a new name and a new walk

Jacob becomes Israel. The meaning of the name is wonderfully suggestive: it can be heard as “he strives with God”, or “God strives”, or “God prevails”. All three belong in the story. Jacob strives; God strives with him; and in the end God’s grace prevails. The old Jacob is not erased, but he is renamed. The past is not denied, but it no longer has the final word.

That is why the title “Results” matters. The result of this night is not that Jacob gets everything under control. He still has to meet Esau. He still carries fear. He also carries a limp. Yet he goes forward blessed. God’s coming leaves him marked,

humbled and changed. In Matthew, the result of Jesus' compassion is abundance from scarcity. In Isaiah, the result of God's invitation is that the empty-handed are welcomed. In Genesis, the result of God's coming is that a schemer becomes a witness to grace.

And there is a Christian shape to this too. Jacob can be seen, at a much lower level, as a faint type of Christ: one who enters human struggle and emerges with blessing for others. But Jesus is more than Jacob. He is God come among us fully, striving not against humanity but for humanity. In his life, cross and resurrection, he prevails as God and man for our salvation. He bears wounds too, but his wounds bring healing.

Conclusion : So, what happens when God comes? The readings have given us more than one answer. God comes as invitation to the thirsty and empty-handed. God comes as the face the psalmist longs to see. God comes in Christ with compassion that feeds a hungry crowd. God comes by the Spirit, stirring Paul's heart with holy sorrow and love. And God comes to Jacob in the night, not to destroy him, but to bring him to truth, blessing and change.

That is the result. When God comes, we may not leave untouched. We may not leave with every question answered. We may even leave with a limp. But if grace has met us, then we leave with more than we brought: a blessing we could not earn, a name we could not give ourselves, and a future we could not make alone. Jacob crossed the Jabbok afraid and alone; Israel crossed Peniel wounded and blessed. May we, too, hold on through the night until God's grace prevails in us. Amen.

Hymn - 610 - Best of all is God is with us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpVfjZ7PxmM>

Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, but death is gain'.

Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.

Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

Andrew E Pratt (born 1948)
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Dedication of Offering : God our Father, as we bring our gifts to you, we pray that you will receive them as part of all that we have and all that we have received from you, and as part of the life that we cherish so much. Take the gifts and take the lives that we offer you: our time, our energies, and our service in your church; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession : I offer you these prayers to pick from and to expand in your circumstances.

Gracious God, as we have heard of Jacob wrestling through the night and rising wounded yet blessed, meet us in the struggles of our own lives of faith. Teach us not to let go of you when the way is dark, when questions remain, or when change is painful. Bring us to truth, deepen our trust, rename what needs to be renewed within us, and help us to walk on in faith, carrying your blessing into the life before us. They went and told Jesus

His [John the Baptist's] disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus. (Matthew 14:12)

We come and tell you, Jesus, all that has happened this day in our lives and the life of the world. We tell you of the joys and wonders: stars shining brightly in the dark sky, mountains reaching up to the clouds, and children playing in a park. But there is more. In our hearts, we tell you of the horrors of our world. Young men and women gunned down in ordinary streets, and those who would destroy everything in the name of their God. We tell you of children abused and lives ruined before they have hardly begun. We tell you of atrocity after atrocity, injustice built on injustice, and our hearts grow weary. Our hopes and dreams are tarnished by this world. We come and tell you, Jesus, and you take us to one side, repairing our hearts and our hopes. You bring us to a place of stillness and you show us your love for humanity.

Person by person, you feed us and invite us to feed others, filling us with life made new.

Terry Hinks ©The United Reformed Church

For the world: We bring to Jesus the places where violence, atrocity, abuse and injustice have made hearts weary, praying for peace, protection, justice and healing.

For our country and community: We bring to Jesus the fears, divisions and anxieties around us, praying for compassion in public life, care for the vulnerable, and renewed hope in ordinary streets, homes, schools and neighbourhoods.

For the family of the Church: We bring to Jesus our worship, service and witness, praying that he will repair our hearts, deepen our stillness, strengthen our love for one another, and make us ready to feed others with his grace.

For personal lives: We bring to Jesus our joys and wonders, our griefs and weariness, our damaged hopes and quiet struggles, praying that he will meet each person with renewal, courage and life made new.

Encounter

In each encounter with another, grant, dear Lord, that I will meet you. Remove from me that which blurs my vision. Gently open my hands, that I may receive gifts that I have not asked for, challenges that I fear, and opportunities that bring me closer to the life you have for me. Suspend in me the critical judgement that encumbers and binds. Free me from the prisons of self-interest. Prepare a place of welcome within me: for you, for others, and for myself. This I ask in the name of the one whose way is life and love and peace.

Carla Grosch-Miller ©The United Reformed Church

Lord Jesus Christ, we bring these and all our prayers to you, that you may intercede with our Father for us. We come to you in the power of your Spirit. Amen.

Hymn - 639 - Through the love of God our Saviour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gpj1SVKoeQU>

Through the love of God our
Saviour
all will be well.
Free and changeless is his favour;
all, all is well.
Precious is the blood that healed
us,
perfect is the grace that sealed us,
strong the hand stretched forth to
shield us;
all must be well.

Though we pass through
tribulation,
all will be well.
Ours is such a full salvation,
all, all is well.
Happy still in God confiding,
fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
all must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;
all will be well.
Faith can sing through days of
sorrow
All, all is well.
On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
or in living or in dying,
all must be well.

Mary Peters (1813-1856)

Benediction : May the God who comes to us in grace meet us on the road ahead. May Christ, who bears wounds and brings healing, bless us with courage, truth and hope. May the Holy Spirit strengthen us to hold on in the dark and walk on in the light. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us always. Amen.