Written Service Sunday January 28th 2024
A service of worship for use at home
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Theme - How do we discern what comes from God?

A moment for quiet and reflection
As individuals, we have heard God's call to spend this time with him, to listen for God speaking to us through scripture, through teaching and music. As a part of a church community, we ask that God will help us to discern his word to us.

Reading Psalm 111
1 Praise the Lord.
I will extol the Lord with all my heart
in the council of the upright and in the assembly.
2 Great are the works of the Lord;
they are pondered by all who delight in them.
3 Glorious and majestic are his deeds,
and his righteousness endures forever.
4 He has caused his wonders to be remembered;
the Lord is gracious and compassionate.
5 He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.
6 He has shown his people the power of his works,
giving them the lands of other nations.
7 The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
8 They are established for ever and ever,
enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.
9 He provided redemption for his people;
he ordained his covenant forever—
holy and awesome is his name.
10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all who follow his precepts have good understanding.
To him belongs eternal praise.

Hymn StF 106 God whose almighty word
God, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight:
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel-day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

Christ you have come to bring
on your redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind:
O now to all mankind
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving holy Dove,
speed forth your flight!
Move on the waters' face
bearing the lamp of grace
and, in earth's darkest place,
let there be light!

Blessed and holy Three,
all-glorious Trinity,
wisdom, love, might:
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride
through the world far and wide,
let there be light!

John Marriott

Prayers
God of all truth and all wisdom,
Of all authority and power,
I come now -
To reflect on the words of your prophets,
To be inspired by the words and actions of your Son, Jesus,
To be challenged by the spirit of your laws,
To discern your will for me
To offer you my prayers and praises,
And to grow closer in fellowship with you.
Amen

Prayer of confession

God of truth, we bring to you those times when we have used cheap words, to avoid costly action
Forgive us and grant us your spirit of strength
We bring to you those times when we have hidden behind the letter of the law to avoid the challenge of the spirit and the law
Forgive us and grant us your spirit of discernment
We bring to you those times when we have disrespected the authority of those you have called to show us a new and different way
Forgive us and grant us the spirit of wisdom.
We ask this in Jesus' name
Amen
Gracious God, you bless us with the gifts of forgiveness and compassion and encourage us to turn away from our mistakes towards your love. We pray with confidence that not our will be done but yours, not our words spoken, but yours, not our authority be revealed but yours, in all we think, say and do.
Amen

Songs

King of kings, majesty,
God of Heaven living in me,
gentle Saviour, closest friend,
strong deliverer, beginning and end,
all within me falls at your throne.

Your majesty, I can but bow.
I lay my all before you now.
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve your majesty.

Earth and Heaven worship you,
love eternal, faithful and true,
who bought the nations, ransomed souls,
brought this sinner near to your throne;
all within me cries out in praise.
Your majesty, I can but bow…

My Jesus, My Saviour
Lord there is no one like you
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of Your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King!
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of your name!
I sing for joy at the work of your hands
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have in You

Readings

Deuteronomy 18 v 15-20

Intro – In the middle of a section outlining various laws to do with boundary markers and sacrifices, the compiler of Deuteronomy inserts some words from God about sending a prophet like Moses.

15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."
17 The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. 19 I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. 20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death."

Mark 1 v 21-28

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. 23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, 24 “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

25 “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” 26 The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Hymn - StF 161 Speak O Lord

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 fulfill 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 pow'r 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.

Reflection

This week’s reading from Mark tells us that the people who heard Jesus teach in the Capernaum synagogue ‘were astounded at his teaching.’ ‘Astounded’ is a very strong word. When were you last astounded by the teaching you heard in church? What on earth did Jesus say to create this effect? The problem is, the Gospel reading doesn’t tell us. Are we supposed to know from what we have read so far? But this is only chapter one! Did the first readers already know from what they’d heard about Jesus elsewhere? Or were the hearers astounded not so much by what was said as by the manner in which it was said?

We are not told about Jesus’ words, but about how he spoke them: ‘as one having authority.’ What does that mean to you? Have you ever met someone who seemed to have a special authority and, if so, what was it about them that produced this effect on you?

People who speak loudly, confidently and coherently, and who are good at self-promotion, often seem to achieve positions of influence in the world – whether in politics, business or religion. Susan Cain in her book Quiet (Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can’t stop talking, Viking, 2012), speaks of the way that saying something and saying it with confidence, seems more important than what is said when it comes to ‘getting on in the world’. Self-confidence and self-assertion give an air of authority that can be very influential. However, when John the Baptist was asked if he was ‘the prophet’– the person referred to in this week’s reading from Deuteronomy – he declined this opportunity for self-promotion and answered with a firm, ‘No’ (John 1:22).

It is often said that a person who craves high office is probably the least appropriate to take it. When Jesus suspected the crowd were about to 'make him a king,' after he had fed them with the loaves and fishes, he withdrew to the mountain to be alone (John 6:15). Perhaps it was this kind of humility coupled with sound teaching that was so astounding: someone who clearly knows what they are talking about but doesn't want great accolades as a result. We might ask how this kind of humility is regarded in today's world and Church? Where do we find it? Susan Cain warns that if we only listen to those who push themselves forward and shout loudest, we lose the wisdom of the quieter and more reflective voices. It is interesting to note that the one who shouts loudest in our Mark reading is 'the man with the unclean spirit.'
Jesus doesn't speak the loudest, but he does speak with the most authority. Remember how Elijah heard God's voice in the 'still small voice.' He didn't hear God in those loud things of an earthquake and fire. God spoke to Elijah with authority in the still small voice. In the quiet moment Elijah had with God in the cave.
Sometimes in our busyness and our bustle, we miss the still small, authoritative voice of God. The voice that gives us the direction and the purpose we need. Take time to listen, to listen to that voice, and in listening and considering, step out in faith, hand in hand with God.

Response
If you have a compass get it now, otherwise use this picture.

In **John 16:13 Jesus says, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.'**
Take a few moments to reflect on these words as you look at the image of the compass.
Perhaps the Spirit is like the magnetism that works a compass. Close your eyes, picture a spinning compass and imagine the Spirit slowly settling it in the direction of God's truth.
Ask God to help you recalibrate your life and your heart, to be open to that 'spirit of truth,' that it might lead you into hearing and discerning God's voice, speaking to your heart**.**

Prayers of Intercession
God of our impressionable world,
we pray for the leaders of the nations,
that they would be wise, just and compassionate
as they exercise their authority.
We remember especially those in power in Russia –
and in the Ukraine.
We remember the governments
in the United States, and here in the UK, as both nations look to the possibility of new leaders,
praying for all leaders as they discern the way forward
amid the difficult social and economic challenges the pandemic brought to us all.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for a smooth and just rolling out of healthcare programmes,
for those who are vulnerable,
for those who mistrust those who seek to help them.
We pray for the families, and friends of – (name those known to you who need your prayers today)
and all ministering to
the dying and the bereaved.
May your truth be known,

and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for those who feel overwhelmed
by the pressures of life,
for those whose relationships are at breaking point.
We pray for those who live with depression,
and for their families and friends.
We pray too for those whose lives are blighted by anxiety and stress.
We pray for the health services and charities trying to support them.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for your church – around the world and in our own community,
we pray for creative ways to serve and to share,
for courage and integrity as we listen and pray,
for urgency and daring as we respond to the needs around us.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray, in a moment of silence,
for all those on our hearts
and for all those who have no one to name them in prayer.
May your truth be known,
and your love be shared in Jesus' name.
Amen

StF 662 Have you heard God's voice

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart
been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and
serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?
Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace God's love and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?
Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of
grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships
start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?
We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace God's love and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow.

Blessing

May God's blessing and peace rest upon you.
May his spirit go with you, as you listen to him and discern his words and his ways.
May the love of Christ, hold you and enfold you.
Amen