Written Service Sunday March 1st 2026
A service of worship for use at home
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Nottingham North East Methodist Circuit
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Opening Psalm - Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
2 My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
4 indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
6 the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

Hymn - StF 338 There is a Redeemer

There is a redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

Thank You, O my Father,
For giving us Your Son,
And leaving Your Spirit—
Till the work on earth is done.

Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.
Thank You …

When I stand in glory
I will see His face,
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that holy place.
Thank You…

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Let's pray

Prayers of Adoration, Confession and Thanksgiving
How can we praise you in life's ordinary moments,
on the bus, car or train, pedestrian moments,
at home and in employment, with all those distractions.
How can we praise you?

How can we praise you when time is so precious,
appointments and targets distracting our focus,
muddying waters, made clean for your purpose.
How can we praise you?

How can we praise you?
Through all of our actions, a smile and a greeting,
a shoulder to lean on, a word in due season,
love and compassion, in all situations
Loving God
all the fancy words in the world,

cannot compete with a heartfelt 'sorry'
when all other words fail.
There are times when we are all too aware of our limitations,
conscious of sin and the distance it creates between us.
Sometimes 'sorry' is all the heart can bear to say aloud.
It is only you who can read and understand the language of our hearts.

Only you who can translate our 'sorry' into the prayer we would have prayed if we had the words within us.

Then you forgive, and having forgiven, surround us in an embrace of love, drawing us close to your heart as it was always meant to be.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This is his gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven.' Thanks be to God.

Thank you, gracious God, that you listen to hearts as well as voices.
Thank you.

Light of light,
Lord of Lords,
God of this world and the next,
We give you thanks for the promise of this day,
We give you thanks for the challenge of this day,

We give you thanks for the blessings of this day.
Light of light,
Lord of Lords,
God of this world
and the next,
We give you thanks.

StF 372 Come down O love divine

Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it,
thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round,
the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings
weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace,
till he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit
makes his dwelling.

Bianco da Siena (tr. R F Littledale

Romans 4:1-5 and 13-17

4 What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' 4 Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. 5 But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are

to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

John 3:1-17
3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' 3 Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' 4 Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' 5 Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' 9 Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?'

10 Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.

12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Reflection
Wouldn't our lives be simpler, if God just spoke to us, like he did to Abram, and told us what we were supposed to do? If God just said – Helen – do this – my life would be so much easier!

Abram is 75 years old when God speaks to him and tells him to move. God says he has to leave his father's house and move to a land 'which he will show him,' meaning Abraham uprooted everyone to a place that he didn't even know yet. What has Abram done to deserve this singular honour – God speaking to him with direct instructions?
What Abram does takes a huge amount of trust on his part, and also that of his family. Imagine your partner says they've just heard God speak and you all need to move to a land that God will show you – so you don't even know where you're going yet. Your partner says let's move away from here. God says it'll be a blessing. To be honest, I think I might wonder at the mental health of someone who's hearing God, but we're more cynical these days, aren't we? Sometimes though, people do tell us they've heard God speak, preachers have felt moved to change their sermons, people change their jobs because God has spoken to them, but the difference is that mostly God speaks to us today indirectly, we get a sense, a feeling. With Abram, God just spoke.

And now we come to the reading from John, the familiar story of Nicodemus. Compared to Abram, who is full of faith and confidence in God, Nicodemus is full of doubt and has no confidence in Jesus at all.

Nicodemus is a well-respected Rabbi, but this passage from John's gospel suggests that he is in spiritual darkness, but also that he may be a little unsure. He is not confident enough to come to Jesus in daylight when people might see him, so he sneaks over at night. But John uses the time of day to also suggest it is darkness of spirit that is of concern to Nicodemus.

Has he been laid awake, unable to sleep with questions about the man from Nazareth? Has he got to the point where he thinks the only thing he can do is talk to him and sort it out for himself? His soul is troubled, he's trying to work out this man, this teacher, this miracle worker, and he realises that the only thing he can do is go and talk to him. He is troubled in mind and spirit, and soul.

Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus is a teacher - is he trying to flatter Jesus, or is he really and truly accepting that Jesus has power from God. He has questions, lots of questions for Jesus.

Personally, I think it's good to question. It's good to be inquisitive and to make your own mind up. Some of this stuff in the Bible is tricky, and we come to it 2000 years after the event. It's difficult to take some of this testimony at face value and to believe it straightaway.
David defeated Goliath using only a slingshot – did he?
Jesus walked on water – really?
He raised Lazarus from the dead, turned water into wine, healed the sick – did he really? Jesus healed people and cast out demons – are you sure?
And don't get me started on Adam and Eve and Noah.

As Nicodemus questions Jesus, he is polite enough; he talks about the fact that he knows Jesus must be from God. He's confused when Jesus refers to being born again. He thinks literally, Jesus puts him straight, no, it's about being born from above, being born in the spirit. Being born again however you see that is something only God can do, it takes the power of God to help someone be born of the spirit. For someone to be remade in the power of God.

Nicodemus now vanishes from the gospel until the very end. He does try to get some compassion for Jesus at his trial, and he helps Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus, bringing Myrrh and aloes, weighing about 150 pounds, suggesting he is a wealthy man. I wonder if John includes this detail of the weight to express that Nicodemus has had a slight change of heart. Maybe he wasn't able to follow Jesus fully – but he did support Jesus from afar and support him generously too. Is Nicodemus a 'secret Christian'? John has no time for secret Christians, he believes you have to commit, you have to be out and proud if you follow Jesus.

Perhaps Nicodemus wanted to follow Jesus, but he didn't want to give up his lavish lifestyle, the power that he had as a leader of the Pharisees, a respected Rabbi. Perhaps he just couldn't make that commitment, stories of healings and people raised from the dead, miracles of food distribution, walking on water, calming storms – for some, these are too extreme to be believed without eye witnessing them, aren't they?

Maybe we know Jesus better than Nicodemus did. Maybe we can be more confident of what we think he did because we have 2000 years of testimony to fall back on – Nicodemus was there and hearing these stories, but he didn't actually see it. If you hear the story that a blind person from birth can now see – you would be slightly sceptical, wouldn't you? You'd be forgiven for thinking there was a trick of some kind.

Perhaps Nicodemus never grasped the facts of verse 16 – 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only son'. Once this is realised and in your heart – it's hard to walk away from it.

Nicodemus was never able to grasp this, and so he never committed, he remained on the periphery, perhaps too scared, or just not faithful enough to accept what he had seen and heard of Jesus.

He has not heard the call of God. Unlike Abram, who in our first reading heard and answered with a resounding yes! Nicodemus has the very person of God in front of him, he still didn't understand, he still doubted.

Verse 16 is perhaps the most beloved Bible verse – it would certainly be in the top 5 – and it is one of the most well-known. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only son.' Probably because it expresses so well what we need to hear – how much God loves us. So much, that he gave his one and only son.

Abram heard God, understood that although the task was hard, God loved him and would bless him. Nicodemus did not realise what Jesus could offer and who he was, and so he missed his chance. I like to think that because Nicodemus was helping with Jesus' burial, he was slowly coming around, after all he'd heard and seen, maybe he was beginning to think. We don't know what happened after the resurrection, maybe Nicodemus heard the stories and sought out the disciples, maybe then he committed. Maybe he was too scared, and although believing fully in Christ, he remained one of John's secret Christians, the one who believed but would not proclaim it. We will never know.

So what about us?

Are you like Nicodemus? Tempted, wondering, drawing close like a moth to a flame, but unable to take that final leap of faith. You're here, so that suggests a certain amount of commitment, but is it really deep in your heart?

Are you like Abram, the 75 year old sent to, he knew not where, who followed God's instructions regardless of the inconvenience, the fear, the newness of it? He had faith and trusted in God. He was not around to hear Jesus say that God so loved the world, but if he had he would have understood that God did in fact love the world and the people in it, so much so that he would go to radical extremes to show it. Later, Abram then known as Abraham - was saved at the last moment from having to sacrifice his own son – God said you don't need to - not your son Isaac, but mine.

Or are you somewhere in between. Perhaps you would love to have the strong faith of Abraham, but it's a really difficult step to take. Or maybe you doubt just a little and feel bad about that. Don't feel bad, it's okay to doubt, in fact I'd go so far as to say it's healthy.

Which are you, what's in your heart? Whichever you are, know that Christ, the son of God who died for us, loves us and he knows when we doubt, and when we don't listen, when we are too scared to act. Christ knows and he understands, he remains beside us regardless, and most importantly, he loves us, just because he does.
Amen

Prayers of intercession
God of Compassion,
Hear the cries of the people of Ukraine,
Bring healing to those suffering from the violence,
Bring comfort to those mourning the dead,
Strengthen Ukraine's neighbours in their care for refugees,
Convert the hearts of those who have taken up arms,
And protect those committed to peace.
We pray for leaders of Ukraine and Russia, that they will search their hearts and find peace.

We have been praying for Ukraine for a long time now, and we may wonder why the war still rages, but we trust you Lord our God, but we ask that you hurry, that you help end this war. You must bring peace.

God of Hope,
Inspire leaders to choose peace over violence and to seek reconciliation with enemies,
Inspire the Church around the world with compassion for all people seeking refuge.
And give us hope for a future of peace built on justice for all.

In a moment of silence we bring before our God all those we know of who especially need our prayers. Those who need God the most, and those who think they need God the least.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,
Prince of Peace and Light of the World,
Amen.

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,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our final hymn - StF 503 Love Divine

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley

Blessing

God to enfold you,
Christ to uphold you.
Spirit to lift you in heaven's sight.
So may God grace you
Heal and embrace you.
Lead you through darkness,
into the light.
StF 648 John Bell

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen