



**Written Service Sunday October 1st**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
**Prepared by Deacon Julie Morton**

Charity number 1134226

**Call to worship**

Come, listen to the One  
**who speaks and summons the earth,**  
**from the rising of the sun to its setting.**

Come, see the One  
**who shines forth in the perfection of beauty.**

Come, bring thanksgiving, the sacrifice that honours the One  
**who shows the salvation of God.**

**Hymn - My Jesus, My Saviour Lord there is none like you**

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

**Prayers**

God above all others,  
Alpha and Omega,  
Beginning and end.  
We see your majesty in the beauty of creation  
and the wonder of each day.  
We worship you as Lord of all,  
Knowing that your love sustains us through times of trial and struggle.

You are a God who calls and equips us to serve you  
And to follow your wisdom and instruction  
Even when the road ahead could be tough.

Forgive us for the times that we've chosen to walk on a path  
Where you would prefer us not to go  
Forgive us when we haven't listened to your advice  
And thought that we knew better.

Remind us each day of the sacrifice

You made through your son on the cross  
Because of the never ending love you have for each one of us.  
And for this we can never thank you enough.

We offer these prayers in the precious name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. 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,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.

### Hymn - Be still and know that I am God

1. Be still and know that I am God,  
Be still and know that I am God,  
Be still and know that I am God.
2. I am the Lord that healeth thee,  
I am the Lord that healeth thee,  
I am the Lord that healeth thee.
3. In thee O lord, do I put my trust  
In thee O Lord, do I put my trust  
In thee O Lord, do I put my trust.

### Reading - Philippians 2:1-13

**2** Christ encourages you, and his love comforts you. God's Spirit unites you, and you are concerned for others. **2** Now make me completely happy! Live in harmony by showing love for each other. Be united in what you think, as if you were only one person. **3** Don't be jealous or proud, but be humble and consider others more important than yourselves. **4** Care about them as much as you care about yourselves **5** and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought:<sup>[a]</sup>

**6** Christ was truly God.

But he did not try to remain<sup>[b]</sup>  
equal with God.

**7** Instead he gave up everything<sup>[c]</sup>  
and became a slave,  
when he became  
like one of us.

**8** Christ was humble.

He obeyed God and even died on a cross.

**9** Then God gave Christ  
the highest place  
and honoured his name  
above all others.

**10** So at the name of Jesus  
everyone will bow down,  
those in heaven, on earth,  
and under the earth.

**11** And to the glory  
of God the Father  
everyone will openly agree,  
"Jesus Christ is Lord!"

**12** My dear friends, you always obeyed when I was with you. Now that I am away, you should obey even more. So work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved. **13** God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey him

## Reading - Matthew 21:23-32

<sup>23</sup> Jesus had gone into the temple and was teaching when the chief priests and the leaders of the people came up to him. They asked, "What right do you have to do these things? Who gave you this authority?"

<sup>24</sup> Jesus answered, "I have just one question to ask you. If you answer it, I will tell you where I got the right to do these things. <sup>25</sup> Who gave John the right to baptize? Was it God in heaven or merely some human being?"

They thought it over and said to each other, "We can't say God gave John this right. Jesus will ask us why we didn't believe John. <sup>26</sup> On the other hand, these people think John was a prophet, and we are afraid of what they might do to us. That's why we can't say it was merely some human who gave John the right to baptize." <sup>27</sup> So they told Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus said, "Then I won't tell you who gave me the right to do what I do."

<sup>28</sup> Jesus said:

I will tell you a story about a man who had two sons. Then you can tell me what you think. The father went to the older son and said, "Go work in the vineyard today!" <sup>29</sup> His son told him he would not do it, but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup> The man then told his younger son to go work in the vineyard. The boy said he would, but he didn't go. <sup>31</sup> Which one of the sons obeyed his father?

"The older one," the chief priests and leaders answered.

Then Jesus told them:

You can be sure tax collectors<sup>[a]</sup> and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you ever will! <sup>32</sup> When John the Baptist showed you how to do right, you would not believe him. But these evil people did believe. And even when you saw what they did, you still would not change your minds and believe

## Message

You probably can relate to what I'm about to say – when somebody asks you to do something that you have absolutely no interest in doing and although you probably could say that you're not interested you don't.

Instead, what you do (or maybe you've heard somebody else do this) you say, yes I really want to spend the day shopping for clothes (or it could be something else). And the person listening knows from the tone of the voice and your actions that what you're saying doesn't line up with what you mean. You are saying one thing but actually mean something totally different. You're saying yes to the request by your mouth but the rest of your being is really saying, "please, please, please don't make me do it."

This is an obvious place where words and actions don't line up. But things much less obvious can often happen as well. Maybe I'm saying yes to something that I really don't want to do, but feel I have to. Which means that my heart really isn't in it and so I don't put the energy I should into whatever it is. Maybe I have every intention of doing something and so say I will, but then don't actually ever get around to it. I must admit that I have been guilty of that one. Maybe the way my words and actions don't line up is that I don't speak up against something or for something when I really should because I am afraid of how people will respond.

Whatever the reason, whatever the method, there is something wrong when our words and our actions are not in line with each other. Today we are looking at a gospel reading about people whose words and actions didn't line up and we are hopefully going to find a way to make our words and actions line up better.

In the reading from Matthew the leaders in the church question Jesus' authority. They decide to play games in the way that they question Jesus and we discover that he is able to beat them at their own game. You see, the leaders are intimidated by Jesus. They don't know quite what to make of him, and he seems to have the people of Israel following him and his teachings. So, they ask a question of him, not to find out the answer, but rather to trap him. They are more interested in playing games than they are in learning something about Jesus. So they ask him what seems

like a simple question, they ask whose authority he is doing the things he does by. We need to look back earlier in Matthew 21 to see what things they are talking about. Matthew 21 begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem as a king on a donkey with the people praising him and singing Hosanna! People were calling Jesus the son of David. And of course, we celebrate this every year on Palm Sunday. And the fact that this comes after Palm Sunday means it is something that happens in the last week of Jesus' life, and these very same leaders in the temple are the ones who are plotting to do Jesus in.

Immediately after the triumphal entry Jesus goes to the temple, to celebrate Passover and worship God at the temple. This is the whole reason he has come to Jerusalem, but Jesus finds something at the temple that breaks his heart and makes him angry. He runs around the temple and overturns tables where people are selling things because he sees that the temple is being misused by the people. They have turned a house of prayer into a den of robbers.

I'm sure this is precisely the thing that the leaders of the temple are questioning. Here comes someone, a man from the backwoods of Israel, from this small area in the north called Nazareth, and he has come in and put a stop to something that they should have put a stop to long before. They see truth in his words, they see authority in his actions, but they decide that it is better to play politics with him than to learn from him.

And so they ask him a loaded question. It is a question that he will have difficulty answering without looking foolish in their eyes. They ask by whose authority he is doing these things. If he says by his own, they then feel they can dismiss him. If he says by God's authority, they can say that he is a madman, that he has overreached his bounds. They are also calling his credentials into question. They had been to schools. They had been to theological college. They had the education and they had the official backing of the temple. He had none of these. Instead, he was just a wandering teacher who had made his living as a carpenter years earlier.

Jesus knows he can't win with the question they have asked, so he fires one back at them. He beats them at their own game. He asks them a question that they can't get away with answering. He asks them about John the Baptist who went before him and who had a difficult relationship with them as well. "Where did John and his baptism come from?" Jesus asked. "From God or from man?" He put them in the same position that they had put him and they did not like it.

What really bothers me about the religious leaders is the discussion they had among themselves. They didn't talk about whether they believed that what John was doing had any merit. They didn't compare what John had taught with the scripture they knew. They looked at it purely from a political perspective. How will our answer make us look? If we say that John's baptism was from God then we'll look bad for not listening to John. If we say it was from man we'll look bad for attacking a person the people like. How cynical, how depressing, how sad.

I hear again and again from people who are looking for truth, from people who are wanting to know God, that they think of themselves as spiritual, they want to believe in God and they think there is definitely something more to this world than just the physical. They are looking for meaning to their lives, but they just don't like organised religion.

Now organised religion can be a scapegoat for them. It may be that they don't like the idea of God or anybody else telling them how they should live or act or what they should do. Sometimes people allow their dislike for organised religion be an excuse to avoid truly following where God is leading them. But at the same time, organised religion isn't always helpful. They see it as a structure that is more interested in the structure itself than in truth, more interested in money and power than in helping those it shepherds. When we get too organised in our faith and set up a structure, some things are lost that Jesus taught. All of a sudden there is a hierarchy that Jesus doesn't seem very interested in. All of a sudden there is someone above you that is telling you what to believe so that you don't need to figure it out for yourself.

The interesting thing for me, here, is that it seems that Jesus didn't have much to do with organized religion himself. He didn't find priests and prophets who would be the leaders of his church. He didn't have the Pharisees and Sadducees and teachers of the law as his main followers. It seems that they were too interested in power and in trying to put him in his place to really hear what it was he had to say. Instead, Jesus took tax collectors and fishermen and ordinary people and had them become his first disciples and then watched them grow into the leaders of his church.

Jesus goes on and tells the people and specifically the temple leaders a parable. And the parable is very clear. There is a man who has work that he needs done and so he asks his two sons to go to the vineyard and do some work. One son shows a stubborn streak of independence and disobedience and says no to his father, but then he finds himself able to and goes into the field and does what his father asks. The other son tells dad that he is going to go do what he asks, but then doesn't. Jesus wonders which is the one that did what his father asked. The answer is obvious. The actions speak louder than the words and what matters isn't what you say you're going to do, rather it is what you do.

We don't know what changed the sons' minds. Did the one who said he couldn't have something change in his diary? Did he change his mind because of guilt? Was his conscience working overtime until he decided to do the right thing? Or was he just being contrary with his father because he wanted to be, though he had every intention of going in the end?

And then there is the son who said he would go and didn't. Did he just not go because he couldn't be bothered? Did he say yes without thinking through whether he really could? Did he forget? Did something come up that kept him from going. When it comes down to it we discover that intentions don't really matter as much as results.

Jesus identifies the one who said no and then went with the tax collectors and the prostitutes; he identifies that son with the lost. These are the people who made bad decisions earlier in their lives and headed off in the wrong direction, but then repented. They realized they were heading in the wrong direction and turned around. They came back and followed.

Jesus is looking at the leaders in the organised religion of the day as those who started in the right direction but then got sidetracked and ended up not following where God had led.

We may have said yes to God early in our lives. And so we have a choice. Are we going to follow through with what we promised to do? Are we going to remain faithful to God and go where he sends us or are we going to let ourselves get distracted and turn away from God's call on our lives? Are we going to be like the Pharisees or are we going to take a third way?

This third way is the son who says yes to his father and then follows through with it. If the temple leaders had looked at John the Baptist's teachings and truly wondered whether they were from God instead of wondering how their answer to Jesus' question would make them look, then the conversation they had would have been much different.

Jesus hadn't given up on organised religion. Not at all. The problem was that the organised religion of the day had given up on him. But instead of giving up on them, he did all he could to try to get them to see and change this about themselves. And there were Pharisees who did follow Jesus, so we know that he did get through to them. Are we going to allow him to get through to us? Are we going to respond when he calls? Are we going to follow through with our promises to him?

In the end it is important to remember that if we have asked Jesus to be our Saviour and Lord, we have promised ourselves to him. The question is whether we are going to live the way we said we would. The question is whether we are going to follow through with our promise. We have said yes to God. Are we ready to follow through and act this out?

Amen

### **Hymn - Take my life and let it be**

Take my life, and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
take my moments and my days,  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King;  
take my lips, and let them be  
filled with messages from thee.

Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love;  
take my feet, and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my silver and my gold,  
not a mite would I withhold;  
take my intellect, and use  
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine;  
it shall be no longer mine.  
take my heart, it is thine own;  
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
at thy feet its treasure store;  
take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee.

### **Prayers of intercession**

God,  
You are a God of compassion and love.  
Time after time we have experienced your care and provision.  
Time after time You've answered our prayers and met our needs—  
often in ways we could never have dreamed possible.  
We praise You for Your faithful love toward us.

Because we have known Your love,  
we come to You with confidence,  
offering our prayers for the world that You love.

We see so much pain and suffering;  
so much anger and frustration and despair.  
It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the needs around us.  
But we continue to bring our prayers to You in faith,  
because we know that nothing is impossible for You.  
You are the God who rained down bread from heaven,  
and made water flow from a rock in the desert;  
the God who resurrected Jesus Christ from the dead,  
and who brings new life and hope to all who believe.  
For You, all things are possible.  
Hear our prayers.

We pray for those who live with serious illness,  
those with chronic pain,  
those without access to proper medical care,  
those for whom treatment is no longer an option.  
Because nothing is impossible for You, O God,  
**hear our prayer, and in Your love, answer.**

Merciful God,  
You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to show us a different way to live—  
the way of deep humility and obedience.  
You've called us to love one another,  
and to work together with one heart and mind,  
balancing our needs with the needs of those around us.  
Give us courage to follow faithfully, and with integrity—  
with actions that bear witness to the words we speak,  
and worship that overflows into our daily tasks and relationships—  
so that our lives will bring glory and honour to You,  
our Redeemer and Lord. Amen.

*Christine Longhurst, re:Worship*

## Hymn - O Jesus I have promised

O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve thee to the end:  
be thou ever near me,  
my Master and my friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
if thou art by my side,  
nor wander from the pathway  
if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me!  
The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
the tempting sounds I hear;  
my foes are ever near me,  
around me and within;  
but Jesus, draw thou nearer,  
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking  
in accents clear and still,  
above the storms of passion,  
the murmurs of self-will;  
O speak to reassure me,  
to hasten or control;  
O speak, and make me listen,  
thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised  
to all who follow thee,  
that where thou art in glory  
there shall thy servant be;  
and, Jesus I have promised  
to serve thee to the end;  
O give me grace to follow,  
my Master and my friend.

## Closing prayer

May the path that Christ walks to bring justice upon the earth,  
to bring light to those who sit in darkness,  
to bring out those who live in bondage,  
to bring new things  
to all creation:  
may this path run through our life.  
May we be the road Christ takes. Amen.