



***Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.***

Psalm 124:8

Who is this who comes to us when we seek him in worship? This One who rides the heavens in creative grace yet is joined with us and our earthly reality conceived in human life? Who stays faithful to us in every moment and every experience?

This One is our God, Creator, Human one and Eternal Spirit.

This is our God and we are his faithful people.

In this shared act of faith, we ask for your presence among us for, in Jesus, we are confident to believe that we may know your love and compassion.

Come to us now, O God, be for us the One whose presence is beyond the boundaries of time and space engaging with us in never ending love.

Hymn 180

*God of many names
gathered into one,
in your glory come and meet us,
moving, endlessly becoming;
God of hovering wings,
womb and birth of time,
joyfully we sing your praises,
breath of life in every people –
Hush, hush, hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Shout, shout, hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Sing, sing hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Sing, God is love, God is love!*

*God of Jewish faith,
exodus and law,
in your glory come and meet us,
joy of Miriam and Moses;
God of Jesus Christ,
rabbi of the poor,
joyfully we sing your praises,
crucified, alive for ever-*

*Hush, hush, hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Shout, shout, hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Sing, sing hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Sing, God is love, God is love!*

*God of wounded hands,
web and loom of love,
in your glory come and meet us,
carpenter of new creation;
God of many names
gathered into one,
joyfully we sing your praises,
moving, endlessly becoming -*

*Hush, hush, hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Shout, shout, hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Sing, sing hallelujah,
hallelujah!
Sing, God is love, God is love!*

Gospel Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Thanks be to God for the Gospel.

Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Confession

O God, it is on the rock of the faith of countless forbears and witnesses to faith that we build our faith and witness.

We know that you will not turn your face from us, even though we are so often people of little faith and unreliable commitment.

You call us to be "rocks" like Peter, but often we are more like clay in the hands of an untrustworthy potter.

Yes, we have clear principles in our initial enthusiasm, but then compromise when the demands on us become more challenging:

Forgive us loving Jesus. Draw us closer again to God's truth.

If we have acknowledged you as our God, affirming with Peter "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**" but then turn to creating you in an image of our making that better suits our purposes and desiring:

Forgive us loving Jesus. Draw us closer again to God's truth.

When we fail to heed the wisdom of the faithful of the past and the teaching and experience of the faithful of the present, closing our minds and hearts to such learning of you because it sits uneasily with the sophisticated world views and cynicism of our time:

Forgive us loving Jesus. Draw us closer again to God's truth.

God of all our days Jesus alone holds before us the reality of God that transcends all human attempts to ultimate knowledge and understanding. We are strengthened when we recognise our failings and inadequacies; we are encouraged when we look upon you for ultimate meaning and purpose; we are blessed when your presence in our lives enables us to take a stand for God's truth as the final arbiter in the quest of the faithful for life in all its fulness.

Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Assurance

Hymn 647

*Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away*

*Though your tears be rivers running,
though your tears be an ocean full,
though you cry with the hurt of living:
comfort comfort.
Every valley shall be lifted,
every mountain shall be low,
every rough place will be smoother:
comfort, comfort.*

*Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.*

*Though your eyes see only darkness,
though your eyes can see no light
though your eyes see pain and sorrow
comfort, comfort.
Every night will have its morning,
every pain will have an end,
every burden will be lightened:
comfort, comfort.*

*Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.*

Robin Mann – inspired by Isaiah 40

Scripture Exodus 1:8-2:10(edited)

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph and he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply.... Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them, with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.

So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the riverbank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

In this is the word of the Lord for us.

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

O Lord may your word live in us ***and bear much fruit to your glory.***

Reflection

In every moment of life, the question hovers over us or confronts us as we make our decisions – “Who is this Jesus?” Clearly the first disciples were not of a single opinion. Some said this. Some said that. They felt that the faith traditions of their heritage had to point them towards a meaningful answer. But Peter not only thought in terms of that heritage but had a conviction that in Jesus was the ultimate fulfilment of all the centuries of faith. **"But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** The same faith traditions that stood behind the acknowledgement of the disciples and then the ‘light bulb’ moment of inspiration of Peter are the key to our understanding of Jesus. But it is not as simple as saying, “this is our God”. For in every age, the church that stands on the rock of Peter’s great affirmation has struggled to affirm the reality of its God in unequivocal terms and has wavered in its commitment and surety. Is God the one who stands at the forefront of our armies as they attack or defend in the name of what we identify as good? Or is God actually at one with those we call enemies, healing and reconciling and suffering because of our actions and perceptions as such as these work for peace? Is the Jesus we would identify with as the Christ of the living God for or against certain human behaviours and certain types of people we would or would not identify with as his people? Does the one true God of faith love candle and incense, or quiet meditation, or hymn-singing with upraised hands – or even all of these?

As we wrestle with these decisions in the critical moments of our lives, there is always the underlying question of “Who and where is Jesus, the ultimate fulfilment of all the centuries of faith from Abraham and Jacob and Joseph and Moses (and myriad others)?” How do I know who Jesus is at this time and in this place and situation? The word of Paul to the early Christians in Rome points us in the only right direction, **present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**

This is our calling as the people of faith, of ultimate faith in Jesus the Christ of God. Amen and Amen.

For this is the word of the Lord.

Prayers for Ourselves and Others

O God, we know that many people around the world find it hard to believe that there is a God faced, as they so often are, by oppression and deprivation in an unloving world. We, too, the people of faith waver in our faithfulness faced with the frightening reality of illness and death and the failure of the science and technology in which we have so arrogantly trusted as if we are the masters of creation itself.

Take our lives this day, O God. Transform us into those who are your living and steadfast witnesses, that all may know your love and compassion through us.

Turn our eyes towards Jesus, the Christ among us and before us, that we may live in truth as those who are no longer conformed to this troubled world but are those who are conformed to the way of Christ their Lord. In whose name we pray as he taught us

Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and forever.***

Amen

Hymn 571

*Forth in your name , O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue,
you, Lord, alone resolved to know,
in all I think , or speak, or do.*

*Each task your wisdom has assigned
still let me cheerfully fulfil
in all my works your presence find,
and prove your good and perfect will.*

*You may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes my inmost substance view,
and labour on at your command,
and offer all my works to you.*

*Give me to bear your easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look
and hasten to your glorious day;*

*for you delightfully employ
all that your bounteous grace has given,
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with you to heaven.*

Benediction

May the face of Christ the Lord be turned towards you,
the holy Spirit guard and guide you
and the Creator go on creating shining life in all its fullness within you.

Amen

Reverend Graeme Kerr