

# **North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)**

## **Service Sheets For the Month of October 2026**

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# **Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2026 – 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*This service was compiled by Rev'd Richard Parkes*

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.  
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

## **A Call To Worship:**

Come and speak with our God who listens.  
Come and meet Jesus who speaks on our behalf.  
Come and hear the God who answers.  
Come and receive the Spirit who helps us.

## **Hymn: Praise To The Living God! (StF 87)**

Praise to the living God!  
All praised be his Name,  
who was, and is, and is to be,  
for e'er the same;  
The one eternal God,  
ere ought that now appears,  
the First, the Last, beyond all thought  
his timeless years!

Formless, all lovely forms  
Declare his loveliness;  
Holy, no holiness of earth  
Can his express.  
Lo, he is Lord of all!  
Creation speaks his praise  
And everywhere, above, below,  
His will obeys.

His Spirit flowing free,  
high surging where it will—  
in prophet's word he spoke of old—  
is speaking still.  
Established is God's law,  
and changeless it shall stand,

deep writ upon the human heart,  
on sea, or land.

Eternal life has he  
Implanted in the soul;  
His love shall be our strength and stay,  
While ages roll.

Praise to the living God!

All praised be his name,

Who was, and is, and is to be,

For e'er the same

Medieval Jewish Doxology

Translated by Max Landsberg (1845 – 1928) and Newton Mann (1836 –  
1926)

Let us praise God, with heart and mind and soul and strength.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

As God's people in this place, let us praise God together.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

Let us praise God with hymns and music, with words and silence, with  
speaking and listening.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

And why should we praise God? Because God is our Lord and maker and  
his love endures forever.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

And why should we praise God? He knows us through and through, he  
knows our goings out and comings in, he knows the number of hairs on  
our heads, the Lord stands at our right hand to guide us and protect us.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

And why should we praise God? His will for us is life in all its fullness. He  
will not leave us in a rut, but will challenge us to live for others, for justice  
for the oppressed, for peace to those whose lives have been torn apart by  
war and hatred.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

And why should we praise God? Because he is merciful, and that mercy  
covers us, even us. And so we too can be merciful. We too can be  
peacemakers.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

And why should we praise God? Because he did not hold back, but he gave us his Son, Jesus Christ. And through his life we learn of God, his love and his Kingdom which we are called to serve. And through his death for us on the cross we become his friends, and through his resurrection he is with us always.

Praise the Lord, **The Lord's name be praised!**

For our prayer of confession, I invite you to watch this video, and sing along, if you are able:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvL2ydZ1K9k&list=RDWvL2ydZ1K9k&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvL2ydZ1K9k&list=RDWvL2ydZ1K9k&start_radio=1)

### **Hymn: Empty, Broken, Here I Stand (StF 421)**

Empty, broken, here I stand

*Kyrie eleison*

Touch me with Your healing hand

*Kyrie eleison*

Take my arrogance and pride

*Kyrie eleison*

Wash me in Your mercy's tide

*Kyrie eleison*

*Kyrie eleison Christe eleison Kyrie eleison*

When my faith has all but gone

*Kyrie eleison*

Give me strength to carry on

*Kyrie eleison*

When my dreams have turned to dust

*Kyrie eleison*

In You O Lord I put my trust

*Kyrie eleison*

*Kyrie eleison Christe eleison Kyrie eleison*

When my heart is cold as ice

*Kyrie eleison*

Your love speaks of sacrifice

*Kyrie eleison*

Love that sets the captive free  
*Kyrie eleison*  
O pour compassion down on me  
*Kyrie eleison*  
*Kyrie eleison Christe eleison Kyrie eleison*

You're the voice that calms my fears  
*Kyrie eleison*  
You're the laughter dries my tears  
*Kyrie eleison*  
You're my music my refrain  
*Kyrie eleison*  
Help me sing Your song again  
*Kyrie eleison*  
*Kyrie eleison Christe eleison Kyrie eleison*

Humble heart of holiness  
*Kyrie eleison*  
Kiss me with Your tenderness  
*Kyrie eleison*  
Jesus faithful friend and true  
*Kyrie eleison*  
All I am I give to You  
*Kyrie eleison*  
*Kyrie eleison Christe eleison Kyrie eleison*

*Nick Haigh and Anita Haigh*

**Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8**, Isaiah, both a priest and a prophet, is swept up in the presence of the divine. He hardly dares approach, and yet he must.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

<sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and

the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'

<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

### **Reading: Luke 10:25-28**

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' <sup>26</sup>He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' <sup>27</sup>He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

### **Hymn: Come, Divine Interpreter (StF 154)**

Come, divine Interpreter,  
bring us eyes Your book to read,  
ears the mystic words to hear,  
words which did from You proceed,  
words that endless bliss impart,  
kept in an obedient heart.

All who read, or hear, are blessed,  
if Your plain commands we do;  
Of your Kingdom here possessed,  
You we shall in glory view –  
when You come on earth to abide,  
reign triumphant at Your side.

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

### **To Ponder:**

Creeds are a statement of belief. The word comes from the Latin 'Credo', I believe. But creeds vary. Some are written to define what the church

believes as against what the church doesn't believe – so it defines its faith against the heretics – hence such wonderful phrases describing the Son as 'God from God, light from light, true God from true god, begotten not made, of one being with the father. That may mean very little today, but 1700 years ago it was a different matter.

The creed I want to go through is the Apostles Creed. It's an old creed, and it's a Baptismal creed. New converts would need to say what they DID believe, because becoming a Christian could have major consequences. The very oldest creed was simply, 'Jesus is Lord'. Which is a good way for us to confess our faith.

Originally, this creed said '\*I\* believe', because it was as individuals that people were baptised into the church of Christ. But I like saying it as 'we' – this is the faith of the church. Especially if you're reading this at home, saying 'we' will remind you that you're not alone. You're part of the church, the worldwide body of Christ.

We believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic and apostolic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

A few years ago, I was able to visit Assisi, the home of St Francis. I worshipped in an ancient church in Assisi, and the preacher challenged me to preach on Christian basics. Hence, the Apostles Creed, which I will do in the next few service sheets I prepare.

The creed begins, 'we believe in God, the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth'.

Who is the God in whom we believe?

First, that word, 'believe'. We believe in God. This is not merely intellectual assent. This is putting your money where your mouth is. Basing your life on it.

BUT God is not primarily a theory, an intellectual proposition. To reduce God to an idea from Philosophy is a mistake. It's wrong. That's Richard Dawkins' mistake (or one of them!)

### **Language**

We believe in God, the father. God is not an impersonal force, like Stephen Spielberg's blue electricity. God is personal. Not *a* person, but personal. Jesus called God 'father' above all else.

Language is always going to be inadequate when we talk about God, and I'd rather talk about God as 'father' than as a force – force is impersonal. But Jesus talked of God and himself as mother-like. It's that caring, affectionate authority that parent language takes us towards. God *\*is\** like that. And that's much more helpful than some of the Greek ideas – such as the unmoved mover.

### **Creator**

And this God, father, parent, is the creator of heaven and earth.

According to this creed, God is not a creation, God is the creator. That's important because sometimes we picture God as a bigger version of ourselves. But that reduces God to a creation. God is the creator. Which means this world is a creation – the creation of a loving God.

And he gives creation a character. Abundance – look at the vast number of stars and planets. There's variety in creation, and tenacity. From a human perspective, there's also ugliness. Nature red in tooth and claw. Freedom – for some people, if God is all knowing, then the whole of the history of creation must be already mapped out. I really don't see it that way – I think God rejoices in seeing what creation will become, rather like a parent excitedly watching their child grow and develop.

Which is why some people talk of God as the ground of being, the origin. Some as mystery. Tells us we can't know everything about God – but a mystery in the Agatha Christie sense is there to be solved, usually by getting all the protagonists together at the end and pointing the finger at the most unlikely suspect. Though I'm beginning to think that Jane Marple was fiction's most devious serial killer...

This does nothing to reject science – science allows us to understand this creation. But, for Christians, a creation is what it is.

So far, I've talked *about* God.

St Francis of Assisi loved God. And, because he loved God, he loved creation. He would find a stick on the ground and pick it up – one moment weeping because it reminded him of the cross of Christ, the next moment leaping with joy at the creation. So, it's no good thinking *about* God, can we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by God.? We can love God because God loves us. God is love.

To put it another way. God is not 'a neat idea'. God seizes us. I believe in God because I can't do anything else.

There is a vitality, a life to God & the divine which can be lost if you start defining God too closely. Often ideas from Greek philosophy such as 'the First Cause, the un-moved mover. The absolute infinite; the ground of our being, that which we cannot understand...' Those definitions leave me cold. And that is a real problem, because I don't want God to leave me cold. I don't want faith to leave me cold. Faith should involve our emotions. Francis Spufford wrote a book called 'Unapologetic: Why Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense'. He argues that faith isn't just an intellectual pursuit, our whole being is caught up in God. It's a great read, but it's also the most sweariest book of theology I've read!

## **Mystery**

Back to mystery - a Holy mystery – a sense of the divine in everything. We need the intellectual to help to guide us as we explore the mystery that is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but we also need to be open to God, open to the divine in everything and everyone.

It used to be the case that every glade or tree was believed to have its spirit. We don't believe that now, for there is one God, the Lord and

creator of all. But as we lost the 'spirit' of each place, we carelessly threw aside the sense of its divinity, its godliness. Instead, it became something to exploit. If a glade had a spirit, then you had to revere the glade. But if it is just a bunch of trees, then it's ours to exploit. If a mountain had a spirit, it was revered. Now, we cut it down or gouge it out for its coal or iron ore.

David Hay (not the boxer) & Rebecca Nye have been doing research on people's transcendent experiences, many of which are the experiences of people with no religious connection. Here's one: "One day I was sweeping the stairs down in the house in which I was working, when suddenly, I was overcome, overwhelmed, saturated... with a sense of the most sublime and living love. It not only affected me, but seemed to bring everything around me to life. The brush in my hand, my dustpan, the stairs, seemed to come alive with love. I seemed no longer me, with my petty troubles and trials, but part of this infinite power of love, so utterly and overwhelmingly wonderful that one knew at once what the saints grasped. It could only have been a minute or two yet for that brief particle of time it seemed eternity."

We won't all have experiences like that. But I hope we can find a sense of the Godly, a sense of the divine in everything and everyone.

So, we believe in God, the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. We trust in this God who is personal, who grabs us by the lapels and gives us the gift of eternity. This God is surrounded by mystery, and we are drawn into his life.

And that mystery is explored as we go through the creed – as we look at Jesus, the one who saves us, the one who we follow.

### **Hymn: Come, Let us Praise The Lord (StF 43)**

Come, let us praise the Lord,  
with joy our God acclaim,  
his greatness tell abroad  
and bless his saving Name.  
Lift high your songs  
before his throne  
to whom alone  
all praise belongs.

Our God of matchless worth,  
our King beyond compare,  
the deepest bounds of earth,  
the hills, are in his care.

He all decrees,  
who by his hand  
prepared the land  
and formed the seas.

In worship bow the knee,  
our glorious God confess;  
The great Creator, he,  
the Lord our Righteousness.  
He reigns unseen:  
his flock he feeds  
and gently leads  
in pastures green.

Come, hear his voice today,  
receive what love imparts;  
his holy will obey  
and harden not your hearts.  
His ways are best;  
and lead at last,  
all troubles past,  
to perfect rest.

*Timothy Dudley-Smith (1926-2024) based on Psalm 95*

### **Prayers For The Church, The World And People:**

We look upon our world with sadness. As the climate gets warmer harvests fail and the poor grow poorer. Many are comfortable and are reluctant to adapt their lifestyles. The climate is changing and we seem to do nothing about it. Yet you have given us stewardship of the planet. We pray that the governments of the world may find the wisdom and courage

to face this issue head on. May we all reflect on how we live and find ways to live sustainably as faithful stewards.

Loving God, **turn hearts and minds towards your kingdom.**

More and more people suffer as a result of mental health issues. We have created a very stressful society. Yet the world seems apathetic about them. Yet you tell us to love all your children. So we pray for those on the brink of despair, that they may find the support and guidance they need. We commend to your care the work of Samaritans and all helplines as they offer care and compassion.

Loving God, **turn hearts and minds towards your kingdom.**

Churches struggle. There are not enough people to do the essential jobs. We worry about 'keeping the show on the road'. We focus on maintenance and have no enthusiasm for mission. Yet you command us to make disciples of all nations. Give us the courage to lay down what is past and listen to your call to be your faithful people in the twenty first century.

Loving God, **turn hearts and minds towards your kingdom.**

Foodbanks report shortages. More and more people turn to them out of necessity. People fear the winter because of the cost of heating our homes. Nothing changes. Yet you call us to feed the hungry and shelter the needy. May those who have plenty know how blessed they are and be willing to share generously with those in need. May nations follow policies that discourage greed and which seek to offer help and support to those in greatest need.

Loving God, **turn hearts and minds towards your kingdom.**

Many are suffering in our world. We remember those in hospitals, care homes and hospices especially. We pray for those on waiting lists hoping for treatment and care soon. We commend to you all who work in health and social care at the front line or in policy making. May the care of individuals be a priority. May all health and social care establishments be places of love, peace and healing.

Loving God, **turn hearts and minds towards your kingdom.**

We try to be caring and loving; we try to see your face in those in need; we try to be faithful disciples but sometimes prejudice, self-interest and

ignorance get in the way. Help us to look at ourselves; at what we believe; at how we live. May we be transformed into compassionate, faithful, Christ-focussed disciples.

Loving God, **turn hearts and minds towards your kingdom.**

In a time of quiet we bring to God our own special concerns and reflections

**Silence**

Loving God, **turn hearts and minds towards your kingdom.**

**Amen**

In the name of our Lord and Saviour we pray:

**Traditional**

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 (StF 18)**

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

*Anonymous, based on Psalm 46:10-11*

**Blessing:**

God has glorified his name.  
He has glorified it and he will glorify it again.  
He will glorify his name in us  
as he has already in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

# **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2026 – 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*This service was compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom*

## **A Prayer Of Approach:**

Lord God, we never know what the future holds or where life will take us next. We never know what is just around the corner and what the outcomes of things will be. But we know that whatever follows on from this moment, you are here with us, by our side, above and beneath us, entwining your life with ours, surpassing all human understanding. In this moment, bless us and awaken us to your abiding presence. **Amen.**

## **Hymn: Be Still, For The Presence Of The Lord (StF 20)**

Be still, for the presence of the Lord  
the Holy One is here.

Come, bow before Him now,  
with reverence and fear.

In Him no sin is found,  
we stand on holy ground.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,  
the Holy One is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord,  
is shining all around.

He burns with holy fire,  
with splendour He is crowned.

How awesome is the sight,  
our radiant King of Light!

Be still, for the glory of the Lord,  
is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord,  
is moving in this place.

He comes to cleanse and heal,  
to minister His grace.

No work too hard for Him,  
in faith receive from Him.

Be still, for the power of the Lord,  
is moving in this place.

### **Prayer Of Confession:**

Eternal God, so often we give up if something goes wrong or doesn't go our way. So often we are overwhelmed by our own problems that we forget to look out for others. So often we are consumed with negatives and endings that we lose sight of the positives and beginnings. Eternal God, forgive us for our self-centredness, our blindness and our deafness, and reawaken your Spirit within us. **Amen.**

### **Hymn: Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind (StF 495)**

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
forgive our foolish ways!  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;  
in purer lives Thy service find,  
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,  
beside the Syrian sea,  
the gracious calling of the Lord,  
let us, like them, without a word  
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
the silence of eternity,  
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all  
Our words and works that drown  
The tender whisper of thy call,  
As noiseless let thy blessing fall  
As fell thy manna down.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease;  
take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,  
O still small voice of calm!

### **Philippians 4.1-9 NLT:**

<sup>4</sup> Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

<sup>4</sup> Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

<sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup> Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. <sup>9</sup> Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

### **Thought For The Day - A Steady Heart in an Unsteady World**

Paul begins by calling the Philippians his *“joy and crown”* a glimpse of how deeply he loves them and how much their faith encourages him. Their perseverance is, to Paul, evidence that his ministry has not been in vain. We rarely think of ourselves this way, but perhaps someone sees *your* faith as their joy and crown—your quiet perseverance, your kindness, your prayers.

#### **1. Unity That Heals**

Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to “be of the same mind in the Lord.” This isn't about agreeing on everything; it's about sharing Christ's mindset of humility and love. Unity is never a private matter—it shapes the witness of the whole community.

Is there a relationship in your life where gentleness could open a door to peace?

## **2. Joy That Isn't Fragile**

"Rejoice in the Lord always." Paul repeats it because joy can slip through our fingers so easily. Yet his joy—written from a prison cell—is rooted not in comfort but in Christ's presence. Joy becomes possible again when our gaze returns to Jesus.

What steals your joy most quickly? What might help you turn your eyes back toward Christ today?

## **3. Peace That Guards**

Paul's invitation is simple and profound: Don't carry your anxieties alone. Pray them. When we do, the peace of God—beyond understanding—stands guard over our hearts and minds. Not because everything suddenly resolves, but because God holds what we cannot.

Where might prayer become your first response rather than your last resort?

## **4. A Mind Set on What Is Good**

Paul ends with a list of things worth dwelling on: whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable. This is not escapism—it is training the heart to notice grace, beauty, and goodness in a world that often amplifies the opposite.

What one "lovely" or "admirable" thing can you choose to focus on today?

## **A Closing Thought**

"Practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Not just peace *from* God—peace *with* God, and God Himself present in every step. Philippians 4:1–9 is a gentle map for daily living: stand firm, seek unity, rejoice, pray, think on what is good, and trust that God's peace is not far off but near, guarding, steadying, accompanying.

## **Hymn: May the mind of Christ my Saviour (StF 504)**

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,  
live in me from day to day,  
by His love and power controlling  
all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly  
in my heart from hour to hour,  
so that all may see I triumph  
only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father  
rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort  
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me  
as the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self-forgetting -  
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,  
strong and brave to face the foe,  
looking only unto Jesus  
as I onward go.

### **Prayers Of Intercession:**

O God, we come to pray not for ourselves, but for each other – for those we know and those we don't, for situations we understand and for those that confound us.

The news tells us of trauma and heartache across the world and we try to grasp the intensity of it all. Bless, O Lord, all involved in the hurting and the healing.

We hear of death and dying, of grieving and weeping...

We hear of pain, scarring and disfigurement...

We hear of anguish and confusion...

We hear of those in need of help, and those who struggle to find it...

We hear of the grieving and the sorrowful...

We hear of the lost and the alone...

And we know, Lord, there are myriad others known only to you. Bless them all in their hurting and their healing. **Amen.**

### **Hymn: We have a gospel to proclaim (StF 418)**

We have a gospel to proclaim  
good news for men in all the earth;  
the gospel of a Savior's name:  
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem,  
not in a royal house or hall  
but in a stable dark and dim:  
the word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary,  
hated by those he came to save;  
in lonely suffering on the cross  
for all he loved, his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:  
empty the tomb, for he was free.  
He broke the power of death and hell  
that we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,  
by all creation glorified;  
he sends his Spirit on his Church  
to live for him, the lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:  
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.  
This gospel message we proclaim:  
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

### **Blessing:**

We go our separate ways, Lord – perhaps with smiles or frowns; with our hopes and with fears; with answers but also questions; maybe crying and with heavy hearts; or with anxieties, or relief. We go our separate ways, Lord, but we never go alone. With thankful hearts, we share the journey of life with each other and with you. Be with us as we go. **Amen**

# **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2026 – 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap*

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.  
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

## **Call to Worship:**

Lord, we know that You are with us at all times.  
We come here today, to rest in Your presence,  
to be surrounded by Your love.  
With Moses, we say, 'Show us your glory, Lord.'  
May we learn to reflect Your glory and goodness. **Amen.**

## **Hymn: To Be In Your Presence (StF 530)**

To be in Your presence,  
to sit at Your feet,  
where Your love surrounds me,  
and makes me complete:

*This is my desire, O Lord,  
this is my desire.  
This is my desire, O Lord,  
This is my desire.*

To rest in Your presence,  
not rushing away,  
to cherish each moment –  
here I would stay.

*This is my desire, O Lord,  
this is my desire.  
This is my desire, O Lord,  
This is my desire.*

Noel Richards (b. 1955)

## **Prayer of Praise and Adoration:**

Creator God, help us to glimpse Your presence in the world around us:  
in the beauty and grandeur of nature; in the bustle of town and city;

in the rich variety of our relationships; in the routine of work and the enjoyment of leisure;  
in special and unforgettable moments and in the daily round of life.  
Where others look and see nothing, help us to view with the eye of faith and to glimpse the reality beneath the surface.  
Open our hearts as well as our eyes, so that we may look beyond the human to the divine,  
beyond the mundane to the sacred.  
Living God, thank You for the wonder of Your love,  
always able to surprise us with joy and with yet more reason to praise.  
Thank You that You are higher than our highest thoughts,  
greater than we can ever understand,  
sovereign over all.  
Help us, this and every day,  
to glimpse more of who and what You are,  
to Your praise and glory. **Amen.**

#### **Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Living God,  
in Your presence, **we ask for Your forgiveness.**  
In Your presence, **we bring those things we are ashamed of.**  
In Your presence, **we lay down our worries, our regrets.**  
In Your presence, **we let go of all that separates and divides.**  
In Your presence, **we acknowledge our lack of commitment.**  
In Your presence, **we offer all that we are and all that we long to be.**  
In Your presence, **we dare to believe that we can begin again.**  
**In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Almighty God,  
when we are reluctant to approach You, **You approach us.**  
when our confidence wavers, **You reassure us.**  
when our sins weigh heavy, **You forgive us.**  
when we feel alone, **You reach out to us.**  
when life feels overwhelming, **You comfort us,**  
and we can rest in the knowledge that You are our God,  
and that we are Your people, accepted, loved and forgiven. **Amen.**

## **You may like to join in the words of the modern form of The 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 for ever.     **Amen**

### **Hymn: Immortal, Invisible , God Only Wise (StF 55)**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might –  
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life Thou givest, to both great and small;  
in all life Thou livest, the true life of all;  
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
and wither and perish; but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,  
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;  
all praise we would render: O help us to see  
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

most blessed, most glorious, the ancient of days,  
almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)

### **The link between our two readings today is:**

Even though Moses misses out on the Promised Land, he gets to experience God's presence which is all part of the larger, biblical narrative. God's presence leads toward God's rest (Exodus 33:14), which leads toward the Temple in Jerusalem, where, centuries later, Jesus fulfils the Law and demonstrates God's presence as living and active. The Thessalonians already live 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'; but they are also 'to wait for God's Son from heaven' – the future fulfilment of God's presence to all.

### **Reading: Exodus chapter 33 vs. 12-23 NIV**

#### **Introduction:**

The Lord commands Moses to leave Sinai and travel with the people to 'a land flowing with milk and honey'.

God will send a leading angel, to show them the way. Moses continues his role as an intercessor, speaking to God in a tent, 'face to face, as one speaks to a friend'.

Rather than wonder whether one can or cannot see God and live, we should recognise that the God who promises to be with us always remains beyond us. The people saw only the pillar of cloud outside the tent as Moses met God within. It reveals both the presence of God, who would be with them, and the hiddenness of God who says only, 'I am who I am).

<sup>12</sup> Moses said to the Lord , "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but You have not let me know whom You will send with me. You have said, 'I know You by name and You have found favour with me.' <sup>13</sup> If You are pleased with me, teach me Your ways so I may know You and continue to find favour with You. Remember that this nation is Your people."

<sup>14</sup> The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. <sup>16</sup> How will anyone know that You are pleased with

me and with Your people unless You go with us? What else will distinguish me and Your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

<sup>17</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

<sup>18</sup> Then Moses said, "Now show me Your glory."

<sup>19</sup> And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. <sup>20</sup> But," He said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

<sup>21</sup> Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. <sup>22</sup> When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup> Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

## **Reading: 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 vs. 1-10 NIV**

### **Introduction:**

That Paul, Silas and Timothy greet the community they had founded as 'the Church of the Thessalonians', rather than 'in Thessalonía', is unusual. Perhaps, by not referring to the Church as 'in' Thessalonía, the emphasis is placed on them being true worshippers who live 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. This is their true residency. The Holy Spirit brings them alive in the presence of 'a living and true God'. The Spirit empowered the Apostles to preach the gospel to them, by word and deed, and the Spirit enables the Thessalonians' own 'work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope'.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

<sup>2</sup> We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup> We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers [and sisters] loved by God, that He has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how

we lived among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup> And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup> The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, <sup>9</sup> for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

### **Reflection:**

Eight year old Johnny got up one morning with a specific plan for the day. He wanted to see God. He thought it might be a long trip so he went prepared with a packed lunch - two boxes of Jaffa cakes and two cans of Cola. He set out on his journey and after a while came to a park. On one of the benches sat an elderly lady watching the pigeons. Feeling a little tired, Jonny went and sat beside her on the bench and watched the pigeons too. He soon felt hungry and pulled out a box of Jaffa cakes. As he ate one, he noticed the lady watching him so he offered her one. She accepted gratefully and smiled at him. He thought she had the most beautiful smile in the world. Wanting to see it again, he opened a can of Cola and offered her the other one. Once again, she smiled that beautiful smile.

For a long time, the two sat on the park bench eating Jaffa cakes and drinking Cola, smiling at each other and watching the pigeons. Neither said a word. Finally, Johnny realised it was getting late and he needed to go home. He got up to leave, took a few steps, turned back and gave the lady a big hug. Her smile was brighter than ever before.

When he arrived home, his mother noticed that he was happy, but strangely quiet. "What did you do today?" she asked. "Oh, I had lunch in the park with God," he said. Before his mother could reply, he added, "You know, she has the most beautiful smile in the world."

Meanwhile, the lady left the park and returned home. Her son noticed something different about her. "What did you do today, Mum?" he asked. "Oh, I ate Jaffa cakes and drank Cola in the park with God. You know, God's a lot younger than I imagined."

Well, a simple story, nothing unusual. Two people sitting together, sharing a simple snack. No need for conversation, just enjoying each other's company. Yet each recognised something in the other that gave them the feeling they had encountered the presence of God.

Johnny and Moses had something in common - both wanted to see God. Down the centuries endless people have made the same request. In John's gospel, [chapter 14 v.9] we read how Philip asked Jesus to show the disciples the Father. Jesus told him that those who had seen Him had seen God Himself. Perhaps you have asked the same question.

So what are we to understand about God from this story of His people - still in the wilderness?

It is widely believed that Exodus was written by Moses. On a number of occasions we read that God told Moses to write down His instructions, particularly in Deuteronomy and Exodus. So what was the purpose of the experience?

It teaches that God's presence, goodness and glory are His greatest gifts to His people, and Moses models a bold, intimate prayer life that seeks God Himself above all else. That was the purpose of the Tent - sited a little way from the camp to allow for that intimacy and privacy. The Tent of Meeting, as it was known, was a temporary place pitched outside the Israelite camp where Moses would meet with God. Anyone seeking guidance from the Lord could go there and a pillar of cloud would descend at the entrance whenever God spoke to Moses, symbolising His presence and authority.

We read how Moses pleaded for God's presence [v.14] asking to know God's ways [v. 13] and ultimately, asking to see God's glory [v.18]. God responds to Moses' plea with assurance, mercy and a revelation of His goodness, while setting boundaries for human weakness.

After Israel's rejection of God with the building and worshipping of the golden calf, God threatens to withdraw His presence from the people. What was Moses to do with the people depending on him to put things right? Knowing that Israel cannot survive without God living among them,

Moses acts. He goes to the Tent to meet with God where God speaks to him as a friend. With this confidence, the stage is set for Moses to make three bold requests.

Firstly, he asks God to 'Teach me Your ways' [vs. 12 – 14]. Moses wants more than instructions; he wants to understand God's character and purposes. He appeals to the covenant God had made with His people: 'This nation is Your people'. God answers with a short but profound promise, 'My presence will go with you and I will give you rest'. Moses knows that without God's presence, the nation will be a hope-less people and lose its identity and purpose. Knowing God's ways is essential for leading His people. Wisdom, strategy and skill are not enough. God's presence is the true source of assurance and guidance.

Secondly, Moses expresses concern: 'If Your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here' [v.15]. Moses refuses to move without God. Israel's uniqueness was not about military strength, culture or law. It is that God lives among them - wherever they go. God reassures Moses that they share an intimate relationship. Moses has found favour in God's sight. That raises a question for the Church today: its purpose and identity come from God's presence, not its wealth, or activities, or size. Without God, we are ordinary; with Him, we are transformed.

Lastly, Moses makes his boldest request: 'Show me Your glory' [vs. 18-23]. Has Moses pushed this relationship too far? He is asking to see God Himself. An impossible ask. God does not get angry, He responds with generosity and protection. God reveals His goodness, affirming His name, mercy and grace. He shields Moses in a crevice in a rock because: 'no one can see God's face' - as we were reminded in our last hymn. God's glory is too overwhelming for human eyes. It is sufficient for us that He graciously reveals enough of Himself to sustain faith, obedience and worship. That is expressly made known through the person of Jesus.

So, we are reminded of three essentials to feed our faith:

- The necessity of God's presence with us: it distinguishes us as belonging to Him. Without Him, we wander and are lost in all the distractions of life. With Him, we can find peace and rest. It poses

each of us then a question: like Moses, are we prepared to settle for anything less than God?

- The boldness of prayer: Moses speaks to God with reverence but not distanced, but as a friend with whom he can speak intimately. He asks for what seems impossible - God's ways, presence and glory. God welcomes, honest prayer that is rooted in His personal relationship with every one of us.
- God's goodness and glory: what does it teach us about the generosity of God that His goodness comes before His glory. His mercy and grace are characteristic of His identity and even the tiniest glimpses of God can bring about transformation.

So, what does all of that say to today's Church and us, as God's people? We should seek God's presence above all else. It should be the number one priority over all our thinking, actions and activities. Like Moses, we are called to a life of deep, intimate, persistent and courageous prayer. We need to remind ourselves how important a priority that is in our daily lives. We need to rest in God's goodness. God will never push us farther than our limits. He will always hold us in His mercy, compassion and faithfulness, and as God's people our Christian identity does not depend on what we do but by the God who goes with us.

All this is characterised in the Thessalonian Christians to whom Paul, Silas and Timothy write, whose lives are rooted in God and his Son Jesus, which is reflected in their relationships with one another. The Thessalonians are held in the persistent prayers of the apostles, who give thanks for their faith, love and hope which are characteristic of their daily living.

Johnny set out to find God - and returned home believing that he had and was happy just to rest in the assurance that this feeling gave him. All it took was a few Jaffa cakes and a can of coke.

In our daily lives, with all its distractions, complications and frustrations - how do we set out to find God? Do we ask Him the deep, profound questions about our faith, devotion and hopes - as the Thessalonians did? Are we bold and direct as Moses was? Are we expectant of an answer?

One thing is certain, every one of us is held in the goodness, mercy and grace of God's enduring presence. **Amen.**

**Chorus: Open The Eyes Of My Heart (StF 451)**

*Open the eyes of my heart Lord,  
open the eyes of my heart;  
I want to see you,  
I want to see you.  
Open the eyes of my heart Lord,  
open the eyes of my heart;  
I want to see you,  
I want to see you.*

To see You high and lifted up,  
shining in the light of Your glory.  
Pour out Your power and love,  
as we sing, holy, holy, holy,  
holy, holy, holy.

*Open the eyes of my heart Lord....*

To see You high and lifted up,  
shining in the light of Your glory.  
Pour out Your power and love,  
as we sing, holy, holy, holy,  
holy, holy, holy.  
I want to see You.

Paul Baloche

**Prayers of Love and Concern:**

Let us pray that the Church may always proclaim the abundance of God's love and help all people experience the richness of God's grace. May we all entrust our lives to God, seeking His goodness and mercy in all that we do.

And so we pray.....

Lord, God, we pray for world leaders and the countries they serve, that those in positions of authority may govern with wisdom, share resources justly and promote peace and solidarity among its peoples. We pray

especially for people whose lives are threatened by war, famine, natural disasters, who live daily in fear and uncertainty.

## **Silence**

We remember those enduring great need: the hungry, those who do not have the means to provide the basics of life, those living on the margins of society, that the providence of God and the generosity of our giving may respond to their plight.

## **Silence**

We remember those for whom life brings challenges and concerns. We think of all those in need of Christ's healing, comfort and peace; those that are ill, have suffered loss, the depressed and anxious, the lonely, and those worried how they are going to feed their families and heat their homes.

## **Silence**

Lord God, we approach You with boldness as we offer our prayers, for all Your people, with faith and hope. May we grow in trust, holiness and generosity, so that Your truth may guide our lives. May our hearts be open to one another in love and encouragement, that we may grow in Your goodness and mercy and live in Your enduring love each and every day.

**Amen.**

## **Hymn: Have You Heard God's Voice (StF 662)**

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 walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

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?

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?

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?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow.*

*We will trust in One who entrusts to us  
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Jacqueline G. Jones

**Blessing:**

Almighty God,

thank You for Your presence,

ever with us and ever impacting our world.

Help us to look for Your presence wherever we go,

knowing we can meet with You wherever we are

and be ready to worship You in our daily lives,

blessed by Your grace, the love of Jesus and the presence of Your Spirit.

**Amen.**

*Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'*

# Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2026 – 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Teddy Siwila*

## **Whose Image Do We Bear?**

### **Call to Worship:**

Let us worship the living God.

**Leader:** Let us sing to the Lord a new song.

**All:** We will bless God's name from day to day.

**Leader:** Let us proclaim God's marvellous deeds among all peoples.

**All:** For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised.

**Leader:** Let us honour God for God's strength, beauty and faithfulness.

**All:** We come to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, with thankful hearts and joyful praise.

### **Hymn: Praise My Soul, The King Of Heaven (StF 83)**

Praise my soul, the King of heaven;

To His feet Thy tribute bring,

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,

Who like Thee His praise should sing?

Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise the everlasting King!

Praise Him for His grace and favour

To His people in distress;

Praise Him still the same forever,

Slow to chide and swift to bless.

Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!

Glorious in His faithfulness.

Fatherlike, He tends and spares us;

Well our feeble frame He knows;

In His hands He gently bears us,

Rescues us from all our foes.

Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!

Widely as His mercy flows.

Angels in the height adore Him;

Ye behold Him face to face;

Sun and moon bow down before Him,  
Dwellers all in time and space.  
Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!  
Praise with us the God of grace!

Francis Henry Lyte (1793–1847)

A hymn of praise celebrating God's faithfulness and care.

### **Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

#### **Prayer of Adoration:**

Holy and gracious God,  
Your mysterious presence stretches to the furthest reaches of the universe, yet in Jesus Christ you have drawn close to us.  
You walk beside us in our homes and hospitals, in quiet rooms and busy streets, in moments of strength and moments of weakness.  
You know each of us by name and hold us in your everlasting love.  
We praise you because your love embraces the whole of creation, and yet you give each of us a place and a purpose within your kingdom.  
By your Holy Spirit you strengthen us, comfort us and equip us to serve you wherever we are.  
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, receive our worship, our gratitude and our love, now and always.  
Amen.

#### **Prayer of Confession:**

Patient and merciful God,  
We confess that we often fail to reflect your image.  
We claim to follow Christ, yet sometimes choose our own way.  
We speak of love, but do not always love generously.  
We seek wisdom, but ignore your guidance.  
Forgive us when fear is stronger than faith, and when comfort is easier than compassion.  
Renew us by your grace.  
Shape us into people who bear the likeness of Christ in our words, our actions and our prayers.  
For Jesus' sake.  
Amen.

### **Assurance of God's Forgiveness:**

Hear the good news.

God knows us completely and loves us unconditionally.

In Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven.

We are set free to begin again, renewed by grace and filled with hope.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **Hymn: Let Us Build A House Where Love Can Dwell (StF 409)**

Let us build a house where love can dwell

And all can safely live,

A place where Saints and children tell

How hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,

Rock of faith and vault of grace;

Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

*All are welcome,*

*All are welcome,*

*All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,

And words are strong and true,

Where all God's children dare to seek

To dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness

And as symbol of God's grace;

Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

*All are welcome ...*

Let us build a house where love is found

In water, wine and wheat:

A banquet hall on holy ground

Where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,

Is revealed in time and space;

As we share in Christ the feast that frees us;

*All are welcome ...*

Let us build a house where hands will reach

Beyond the wood and stone  
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
And live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
Bear the image of God's face;  
Let us bring an end to fear and danger:

*All are welcome,*

Let us build a house where all are named,  
Their songs and visions heard  
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
As words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

*All are welcome...*

*Marty Haugen (B. 1950)*

A hymn reminding us that every person is welcomed, valued and bears God's image.

### **Scripture Readings**

#### **Old Testament: Isaiah 45:1–17**

**45** “This is what the Lord says to his anointed,  
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of  
to subdue nations before him  
and to strip kings of their armor,  
to open doors before him  
so that gates will not be shut:  
<sup>2</sup> I will go before you  
and will level the mountains<sup>[a]</sup>;  
I will break down gates of bronze  
and cut through bars of iron.  
<sup>3</sup> I will give you hidden treasures,  
riches stored in secret places,  
so that you may know that I am the Lord,  
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.  
<sup>4</sup> For the sake of Jacob my servant,

of Israel my chosen,  
I summon you by name  
and bestow on you a title of honor,  
though you do not acknowledge me.  
<sup>5</sup> I am the Lord, and there is no other;  
apart from me there is no God.  
I will strengthen you,  
though you have not acknowledged me,  
<sup>6</sup> so that from the rising of the sun  
to the place of its setting  
people may know there is none besides me.  
I am the Lord, and there is no other.  
<sup>7</sup> I form the light and create darkness,  
I bring prosperity and create disaster;  
I, the Lord, do all these things.  
<sup>8</sup> “You heavens above, rain down my righteousness;  
let the clouds shower it down.  
Let the earth open wide,  
let salvation spring up,  
let righteousness flourish with it;  
I, the Lord, have created it.  
<sup>9</sup> “Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker,  
those who are nothing but potsherds  
among the potsherds on the ground.  
Does the clay say to the potter,  
‘What are you making?’  
Does your work say,  
‘The potter has no hands’?  
<sup>10</sup> Woe to the one who says to a father,  
‘What have you begotten?’  
or to a mother,  
‘What have you brought to birth?’  
<sup>11</sup> “This is what the Lord says—  
the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker:  
Concerning things to come,  
do you question me about my children,

or give me orders about the work of my hands?  
<sup>12</sup> It is I who made the earth  
and created mankind on it.  
My own hands stretched out the heavens;  
I marshaled their starry hosts.  
<sup>13</sup> I will raise up Cyrus<sup>[b]</sup> in my righteousness:  
I will make all his ways straight.  
He will rebuild my city  
and set my exiles free,  
but not for a price or reward,  
says the Lord Almighty.”  
<sup>14</sup> This is what the Lord says:  
“The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush,<sup>[c]</sup>  
and those tall Sabeans—  
they will come over to you  
and will be yours;  
they will trudge behind you,  
coming over to you in chains.  
They will bow down before you  
and plead with you, saying,  
‘Surely God is with you, and there is no other;  
there is no other god.’”  
<sup>15</sup> Truly you are a God who has been hiding himself,  
the God and Savior of Israel.  
<sup>16</sup> All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced;  
they will go off into disgrace together.  
<sup>17</sup> But Israel will be saved by the Lord  
with an everlasting salvation;  
you will never be put to shame or disgraced,  
to ages everlasting.

### **Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10**

**1** Paul, Silas<sup>[a]</sup> and Timothy,  
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus  
Christ:  
Grace and peace to you.

**Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians’ Faith**

<sup>2</sup> We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup> We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers and sisters <sup>[b]</sup> loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup> And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup> The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, <sup>9</sup> for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

## **Gospel: Matthew 22:15–22**

### **Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar**

<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.

<sup>16</sup> They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. <sup>17</sup> Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax <sup>[a]</sup> to Caesar or not?”

<sup>18</sup> But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, <sup>20</sup> and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

<sup>21</sup> “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

<sup>22</sup> When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

## **Reflection**

### **Whose Image Do We Bear?**

Dear friends in Christ,

Not long ago, someone in North Staffordshire was digging in their garden when they discovered an old coin buried in the soil. It was covered in mud and so worn that it seemed almost worthless. Curious, they washed it carefully. Little by little, the dirt disappeared and the image stamped on the coin became visible once again.

The coin had never lost its image. It had simply been hidden.  
That little story opens today's Gospel.

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a political question about paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus asked for a coin and said, "Whose image is this?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

Jesus answered, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

Jesus was talking about much more than taxation. Coins carry Caesar's image, but people carry God's image. Our deepest identity is not found in what we own, what we earn, or what we can do. It is found in the God who created us in love.

For many who receive this service at home, life has changed. Illness, reduced mobility, or growing older can make us feel that our usefulness has diminished. Yet today's readings speak gently into those feelings.

Isaiah reminds us that God worked through Cyrus, a ruler who did not even know God. The Lord can work through unexpected people and unexpected circumstances. Nothing limits God's purposes—not illness, not age, not changing times.

Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica, thanking them because their faith, love and hope had become an example to others. They were an ordinary Christian community living through uncertain times, yet their lives pointed others towards Christ.

That sounds rather like many communities across North Staffordshire. We have seen industries close, villages change, and congregations become smaller. Yet God's work has not finished. Christ is still present in Silverdale, Higherland, Audley, Bradwell, Halmer End, Madeley, Wolstanton, Cross Heath, St Luke's and every place where people gather in his name.

And Christ is present in your home today.

If you are praying from your armchair, listening from a care home, or receiving this service because you cannot be at church, please remember this: your prayers still matter, your faithfulness still matters, and your witness still matters. God's Church is strengthened by those who pray as much as by those who stand behind a lectern.

Think again about that coin from the garden. Its value did not come from being polished. Its value came from the image it carried.

The same is true for you.

You may feel worn by the years or burdened by illness, but God's image remains within you. Christ sees that image clearly, even when we struggle to see it ourselves.

May God gently wash away discouragement, renew the image of Christ within us, and help us reflect his love wherever we are.

Amen.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Faithful God,

We thank you for all those who have taught us the faith—parents and grandparents, ministers and local preachers, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, friends and neighbours whose lives have shown us the way of Christ.

On this Sunday, we give thanks for all who teach and study within the Methodist Church. Bless those training for ministry, those preparing to preach, pastoral visitors, children's workers and all who continue learning throughout their discipleship.

Grant wisdom to our theological colleges and learning communities, that they may equip women and men to proclaim the Gospel with faithfulness, imagination and hope.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We pray for the churches of the North Staffordshire Methodist Circuit.

Bless our ministers, local preachers, worship leaders, pastoral visitors, church stewards and volunteers.

Strengthen congregations as they seek new ways of sharing the love of Christ in changing communities.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We pray for those who are housebound, those living in care homes, those recovering from illness and those who feel lonely today.

May they know the companionship of Christ and the care of the Church.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We pray for our communities throughout North Staffordshire—for schools and colleges, hospitals and care homes, local businesses, charities and food banks.

Help us to reflect your image through kindness, justice and compassion.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

In a moment of quiet, we bring before God those people and places especially on our hearts today.

Silence is kept.

Merciful Father,

Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

### **The 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: The Spirit Lives To Set Us Free (StF 397)**

The Spirit lives to set us free,

walk, walk in the light;

He binds us all in unity,

walk, walk in the light.

*Chorus: Walk in the light, walk in the light,  
Walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.*

Jesus promised life to all,

walk, walk in the light;

the dead were wakened by His call,

walk, walk in the light.

He died in pain on Calvary,

walk, walk in the light;

to save the lost like you and me,

walk, walk in the light.

We know His death was not the end,

walk, walk in the light;

he gave His spirit to be our friend,

walk, walk in the light.

By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,

walk, walk in the light;

the Father's kindness is revealed,

walk, walk in the light.

The Spirit lives in you and me,  
walk, walk in the light;  
His light will shine for all to see,  
walk, walk in the light.

Damian Lundy (1944 – 1996)

A hymn of encouragement, reminding us that God's Spirit continues to renew and send us into faithful living wherever we are.

### **Blessing**

Go in peace, knowing that you bear the image of God.  
Go in hope, trusting that Christ walks beside you each day.  
Go in love, reflecting God's grace in every prayer, every conversation and every act of kindness.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648)  
e-mail: [northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk)) know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.

**Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.**