

Cheshire South Methodist Circuit
Worship at Home – 1st November 2026



Call to Worship

Open our ears, to hear your word.
Open our eyes, to see your presence.
Open our minds, to the beauty of truth.
Open our hearts, to the joy of new life.

StF no. 545 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

1 Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
be all else but naught to me, save that Thou art;
be Thou my best thought in the day and the
night,
both waking and sleeping, Thy presence my light.

2 Be Thou my Wisdom, be Thou my true Word;
be Thou ever with me and I with Thee, Lord;
be Thou my great Father, thy child let me be,
be Thou in me dwelling, and I one with Thee.

3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true
might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong
tower,
O raise Thou me heavenward, great power of my
power.

4 Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
be thou mine inheritance, now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart,
O Sovereign of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century
Translator: Mary E Byrne:
Versifier: Eleanor H Hull
CCL821965

Prayers of adoration and confession

Loving gracious God, we come before you as your thankful children. We give you thanks for your guidance, your prodding and your leading over the years. Father, we thank you for the joy of life and for the wonderful world in which you have placed us; for all those whom you have given us to share our journey through life; for family and close friends; for those with whom we have shared precious moments and those who were there when we needed them.

Father, we thank you that we can trust you in every situation and not simply when life is good and wholesome, but when we are facing problems; we thank you for the assurance that there is no darkness that your love cannot penetrate, and there is no burden that you cannot carry.

Father, we thank you for the whole life and ministry of Jesus that gives us hope and for the promise of the Holy Spirit, who gives us new life. And we thank you that there is nothing that can ever separate us from your love.

Heavenly Father, our lives and all our ways are like an open book before you. There is nothing we can hide from you, and with humility we recall those things in which daily we come short of the standard set for us by Christ. Have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 23: 1 – 12 Jesus Denounces Scribes and Pharisees

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’s seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others, but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶ They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. ⁹ And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Message

In today’s reading Jesus is being critical of the Pharisees. Firstly, Jesus tells his listeners that they should observe the teachings of the Pharisees. Jesus has no problem with the teaching of the Pharisees, because their teachings are correct. However, Jesus does not want his disciples to follow the example of the Pharisees.

The opening verses indicate that the Pharisees have got so caught up in their status within the community that they spout off their knowledge and righteous answers without actually living in a way that reflects what they say. This is where Jesus takes issue. He is quick to call out those who have become lazy in their ivory towers of religious authority. While their teaching may indeed be sound, they have missed the point. Unfortunately, they did not practice what they preached.

Many Pharisees loved sitting in the places of honour. So, when they went to the synagogue or to a banquet, they automatically took the best seats that were available. The Pharisees also expected everyone to treat them with high regard and respect because of their religious position. Jesus questions all these outward signs of being religious that the Pharisees exhibited and questions their motivation.

But, what if, these same tendencies of the first century religious leaders aren’t so far removed from our own? Perhaps the vanity, hypocrisy, and arrogance that troubled Jesus are more universal human characteristics that we all embody more than we’d like to admit.

The lure of power is great for us, too. We all have things we yearn for in life: success, status or simply being liked by others. As human beings we like to matter, to be important, to be honoured. We all want to be known and loved. For the Pharisees, Jesus is pointing them to the heart of their faith, and reminding the Pharisees they should practise what they preach. In our own day to day lives, we sometimes need those reminders, too. We get caught up in the excitement of our own accomplishments and are blinded to others as we beam with our own pride. This passage, though, calls us off our pedestals to consider that it’s really not about us.

Jesus instructs his disciples that their role is to serve the people – not to be served. They are to follow the Jewish laws and customs as the Pharisees taught, but they are not to follow the Pharisees' example. Jesus encourages his disciples to be humble and to serve.

Each one of us are the beloved of God, and as the beloved of God, we also need to live by God's law of love. We are to care for our neighbour and all people who are in need. So, this reading challenges us to be aware of our own personal motivations! Why do we do what we do? Is it so others will think highly of us? Or is it because we simply care about people and desire to help them as best we can?

Service is a great gift to give others. Most of the time our service consists of small daily tasks or actions. However, in this process, perhaps the true gift is noticing another's need and then reaching out to serve in a loving way!

Today may we have open eyes and open hearts. May we reach out to the people around us and care for them, and humbly take our seats as students of the one true God. Because we still have a lot more to learn.

When I was preparing this message I came across a wonderful story about a lady called Grace Little. Her first name describes her spirit and her last name describes her stature. She was a rather small woman with a big heart and an even bigger spirit. Every time the doors opened at her church, Grace was there. Not because she had to be but because she wanted to be. She loved the Lord with every ounce of her soul. She loved working for the Lord and thought it a privilege to help set up or clean up or just attend any function at the Church. Grace was always there. Grace made a huge impact on the life of her Church. When Grace died, they found her, lying in bed, her Bible was open and on the bed next to her and her hands were folded in prayer.

What made Grace so special? Grace did what the Pharisees in this passage didn't do. Grace never thought of herself as a saint. She only thought of herself as a servant. Grace let the light of God shine through her. And when she did, lives were influenced and changed.

To follow Jesus, to become a Christian, is to become a servant. Unlike the proud priests and scribes in this gospel, becoming a true servant means purging ourselves of vanity, resentments, jealousies...all the self-centred things that crowds out peace and excludes serenity. To have a servant's heart is to have a heart rich to overflowing... rich in grace... rich in hope... rich in the love of Jesus Christ. A servant's heart... a happy heart... that's what I pray for... for you... for me... for all of God's beloved. It's the closest thing we'll have to heaven on earth.

Let us pray

Gracious God as your people we come now to rededicate ourselves to the task you have set before us, we rededicate ourselves anew to living a life that reflects your presence with us and your love for each one of us. We rededicate our lives to your service and the service of others, just as our Lord came to serve. Loving God, renew and strengthen in us the joy of knowing you, and our faith and trust in your Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

O God of all justice and peace we cry out to you in the midst of the pain and trauma of violence and fear which prevails in the world. Be with those who need you in these days of suffering; We pray to you, O Lord, for an end to violence and the establishment of peace, we also call for you to bring justice

and equity to all people. Guide us into your kingdom where all people are treated with dignity and honour as your children, for you are our Heavenly Father.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Loving God, we thank you for the people who sustain us by their love and kindness. Our family and friends who support and strengthen us when we are weary and struggling. Make us alert to each other's needs and quick to serve and encourage one another. May our gentleness with each other reflect your gentleness with us.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Heavenly Father, we pray for those who are suffering and those who are experiencing illness and pain. We trust in your love for all people, and your deep desire for their well-being. As we name in our hearts those who are in the grip of suffering and pain, help us to pray and act that they may know your comfort and healing, both now and in the days to come.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Gracious God, at the start of this new week, recognising your trust in us to live and preach the Gospel, make us always more ready to please you rather than to seek the praise of the secular world.

Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer *Our Father ...*

StF no. 407 Hear the call of the kingdom

Hear the call of the kingdom
Lift your eyes to the King
Let His song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God rich in mercy
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven
The humility of Christ
Walking justly before Him
Loving all that is right
That the life of Christ may shine through
us

*King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name*

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

Stuart Townend, Keith and Kristyn Getty
CCL821965

Blessing

2 Corinthians 13: 14 - (benediction of love) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen

This service was prepared by Jenny Smith