

**Circuit Service 20<sup>th</sup> November 2022**  
**(The Sunday of Christ the King)**

**From Psalm 95**

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;  
for he is our God

**Hymn StF58 Lord I come before your throne of grace**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bekyy2PG1Cc>

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| <p>1 Lord, I come before your throne of grace ;<br/>I find rest in your presence<br/>and fullness of joy.<br/>In worship and wonder<br/>I behold your face,<br/>singing what a faithful God have I.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>What a faithful God have I,<br/>what a faithful God.<br/>What a faithful God have I,<br/>faithful in every way.</i></p> | <p>2 Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry ;<br/>through the storm you're the beacon,<br/>my song in the night.<br/>In the shelter of your wings,<br/>hear my heart's reply,<br/>singing what a faithful God have I.</p> <p>3 Lord all sovereign, granting peace from heaven,<br/>let me comfort those who suffer<br/>with the comfort you have given.<br/>I will tell of your great love for as long as I live,<br/>singing what a faithful God have I.</p> <p>Robert Critchley (b. 1959) and Dawn Critchley (b. 1965)</p> |
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The Book of Revelation presents a vision of worship in heaven and on earth:

*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:  
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honour and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!"*

Lord, we come now to worship before your throne of grace. We come as your people, eager to know your presence and to know you moving among us. Whether we sit before you by ourselves or as a congregation, we are part of your great Church spread across heaven and earth and across all time. Lord, we come to you because you call us your children. You made us co-inheritors of your kingdom through the cross of Jesus who is the first-born amongst us and now the Lord of glory.

We say sorry for our failure to love and for the many things we have done wrong this week.

Thank you that according to your promises in Jesus Christ we are forgiven and restored to fellowship with you. We thank you Lord for this and for your many blessings that keep us going and prepare us for your kingdom.

**Lord's Prayer**

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, they 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 StF337 There is a higher throne

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hfUQBgfptM>

1 There is a higher throne  
than all this world has known,  
where faithful ones from every tongue  
will one day come.  
Before our God we'll stand,  
made faultless through the Lamb ;  
believing hearts find promised grace :  
salvation comes.

*Hear heaven's voices sing,  
their thunderous anthem rings  
through emerald courts and sapphire skies,  
their praises rise.  
All glory, wisdom, power,  
strength, thanks and honour are  
to God, our King who reigns on high  
for evermore.*

2 And there we'll find our home,  
our life before the throne ;  
we'll honour him in perfect song  
where we belong.  
He'll wipe each tear-stained eye,  
as thirst and hunger die ;  
the Lamb becomes our Shepherd King :  
we'll reign with him.

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Kristyn Getty (b. 1980)

### Reading, Colossians 1:9b-20

[Note on the reading. *This is one of Paul's last letters probably written from Rome not long before his execution. After years preaching the gospel across the Empire, he now writes a letter to a church he has never visited. Paul includes a 'heads-up' reflection on who Jesus is, risen and glorified, and its meaning for believers.*]

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, <sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, <sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

### Sermon: Who do you think you are?

There's a programme on BBC called 'Who do you think you are?' Each episode traces back the heritage of a celebrity. It goes back many generations and usually finds a surprise - a heart-breaking experience or an unexpected connection to somebody famous. There was the case of somebody from apparently humble origins who is descended from a mediaeval king. I can't remember who it was off the top of my head.

There are other similar programmes. One uses DNA to discover origins and connect to unknown relations. Another programme traces the history of a particular house and its inhabitants since it was built.

Our background matters to us. Going back a few generations, my family on both sides worked the land in Lincolnshire. They were remarkably unremarkable, but they have some interesting names. On my mother's side there was one called Massingberd – that was his first name - Osbourne.

If somebody asks us who we are, what defines who we are, what is our identity, what do we say? Place of up-bringing and family history are part of it. Today's reading from Colossians is Paul telling us who we are. Paul writes of our family history in a different sense in which God is our Father, Jesus is his Son and we are adopted into the family as joint heirs with Jesus. It forms our identity just as much as our earthly family. Let us see what Paul tells us of who we are.

Most of what I read is non-fiction. Instead of beginning at the beginning and ending at the end, occasionally I find it more helpful to read the last chapter first and then work my way backwards through the book. Today's reading works well if read backwards since its beginning follows as a consequence of its end.

The last few verses give an extraordinary picture of Jesus as the glorified Lord. Jesus was not just a man who walked the roads of Galilee. He was there at the beginning of time. All things were created through him. In him all things hold together. In him all things will be reconciled to God. And even as a man in Galilee all fullness of God dwelt in him. This was Paul reflecting on Jesus at the end of his life. Colossians was one of the last letters he wrote. Over the course of three decades following Jesus he had learnt that Jesus was much more than an ordinary man, although he was at the same time just that – born of a human mother like any other human being with the same desires and impulses and physical limitations that we all have. I will not pretend to understand this, but that doesn't stop it being true.

Tracing Paul's argument backwards in the preceding verses, Paul writes of our identity in relationship to Jesus as Christ. Paul writes not of each of us individually but collectively as the Church – not even as a collection of individual churches in Reading or Basingstoke or places in between. We are the Church with a capital 'C' spread across space and time as a cosmological and eternal entity. The Church is the Body of Christ and within the Body, Jesus is its Head.

Tracing back the argument towards the beginning of the reading, Paul speaks of us individually as members of the Body. Paul uses the language of family. He writes of God the Father, Jesus as the Son, and ourselves as co-inheritors of what the Father bequeaths to the Son. As Paul writes elsewhere we are adopted as children of God. In Roman law, adopted children have the same rights as naturally born children. Jesus is the first-born and we share in the inheritance that belongs to Jesus. Paul writes here that our identity as children of God is granted through the cross which brings redemption and forgiveness of sins. Once again, I do not pretend to understand, but it still a truth that we can hold on to. This is our identity, that we are members of a family in which God is Father and Jesus has the special place of being the first-born.

We have now arrived back at the beginning of the reading. Paul's first sentence in the reading is more easily understood because it relates to life as we experience it. The sentence is long and can be split into two parts. Its second half is a list of the benefits and responsibilities of our identity as God's children. In other words, it follows from what comes later in the passage. It comes in prayer form. Paul's prayer is that the Christians in Colossae may

*live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, <sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.*

And now back to the first half of the first sentence where Paul prays for the Colossians:

*We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives...*

This is how it becomes a reality that we are the Body of Christ the Son and co-inheritors of the promises of God the Father. It is the Spirit who makes it real to us and in us. The Spirit brings wisdom and understanding which fills us with knowledge of God's will that we may live lives worthy of the Lord.

Who do you think you are? In this passage, Paul tells us who we are. Having read the passage backwards, now let us read it forwards.

Paul starts with the Spirit working in us to change us as we grow in wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He then sets out how our growth in the Spirit is driven by our identity as members of God's family - and then in turn how our identity is founded on the identity of Jesus Christ in whom all things were created, all things hold together, and in whom all things will be reconciled. This is who Jesus Christ is. And as a consequence, and by grace, it is how God makes us who we are.

### StF63 Over all the earth you reign on high

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21WB2G\\_Scs8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21WB2G_Scs8)

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| <p>1 Over all the earth, you reign on high,<br/>every mountain stream, every sunset sky.<br/>But my one request, Lord, my only aim<br/>is that you'd reign in me again.<br/><i>Lord, reign in me, reign in your power<br/>over all my dreams, in my darkest hour.<br/>You are the Lord of all I am,<br/>so won't you reign in me again ?</i></p> | <p>2 Over every thought, over every word,<br/>may my life reflect the beauty of my Lord ;<br/>'cause you mean more to me than any earthly<br/>thing,<br/>so won't you reign in me again ?<br/>Brenton Brown</p> |
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### Prayers

[The following may be out of date by 20<sup>th</sup> Nov. Please substitute your own prayers as appropriate]

As we have just sung, we ask you to reign in our hearts as you already reign on high. And we pray that you may reign in the hearts of all people to bring justice and peace.

We pray for peace in the world, for freedom from fear, for safety for refugees – especially in Ukraine where many have died in battle or as civilians, and where many are displaced from shattered homes.

The COP27 conference has now ended (*outcome unknown at time of writing*). We pray that the need for climate control may not pass from our minds and from the minds of world leaders.

As this country faces financial challenges, may we place the weak and vulnerable at the centre of our thinking so that no child suffers hunger, and no-one who is frail shivers in unheated homes. We pray for health services and carers in their work.

Lord, we pray for the church which is your body. Give us wisdom and understanding as we try to follow you and try to be a gateway into the world for your love.

Lord, you know the concerns on our hearts. You know the people we have on our hearts. We hold them before you and ask you to work in them according to your love.

We pray to you Lord because you are before all things, in you all things hold together, and in you all things will find reconciliation. We trust in you, and pray that we may bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God. For you rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son. We worship and thank you as our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

### The offering

Lord we ask you to bless the offerings we make – offerings of money, of our service, and of our very selves. Accept our offering and use it for the coming of your kingdom.

### StF690 The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHCqXL3mCwU>

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| <p>1 The Church's one foundation<br/>is Jesus Christ her Lord ;<br/>she is his new creation<br/>by water and the word ;<br/>from heaven he came and sought her<br/>to be his holy bride ;<br/>with his own blood he bought her,<br/>and for her life he died.</p> <p>2 Called out from every nation,<br/>yet one through all the earth,<br/>her charter of salvation<br/>one Lord, one faith, one birth ;<br/>one holy name she blesses,<br/>and shares one holy food,<br/>as to one hope she presses<br/>with every grace endued.</p> | <p>3 In toil and tribulation,<br/>and tumult of her war,<br/>she waits the consummation<br/>of peace for evermore ;<br/>till with the vision glorious<br/>her longing eyes are blest,<br/>at last the Church victorious<br/>shall be the Church at rest.</p> <p>4 Yet she on earth has union<br/>with God the Three in One,<br/>and mystic, sweet communion<br/>with those whose rest is won.<br/>O happy ones and holy !<br/>Lord, give us grace that we,<br/>with them, the meek and lowly,<br/>in heaven your face shall see.</p> <p>Samuel John Stone (1832–1900)</p> |
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### Blessing

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make straight your paths.

And the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us all now and always.