

## Circuit service 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021

*'Be still and know that I am God'*

**Hymn: StF152 This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXZwW0D2OZ4> (Adult version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T10pfn2FK2A> (Childrens version)

<p>1 This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made, that the Lord has made. We will rejoice, we will rejoice and be glad in it, and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made.</p> <p>2 This is the day, this is the day when he rose again, when he rose again. We will rejoice, we will rejoice and be glad in it, and be glad in it. This is the day when he rose again ; we will rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day, this is the day when he rose again.</p>	<p>3 This is the day, this is the day when the Spirit came, when the Spirit came. We will rejoice, we will rejoice and be glad in it, and be glad in it. This is the day when the Spirit came ; we will rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day, this is the day when the Spirit came.</p> <p>Anonymous</p>
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### Prayer

We thank you Lord for this day. We thank you that it is a special day when we can set aside time to join together as your people – knowing that you promise to meet us. May we be aware of your presence. May we know you moving among us as we worship.

Lord, we come to you in repentance for the things we have done wrong. We call you 'Lord' but we do not always give you that position in our lives.

We thank you that whatever we do, you do not turn us away. We commit ourselves once again to following you.

Lord, we praise you for your generosity towards us – even giving yourself to us on the cross. This is more than we can ever merit. You love us out of your own goodness that transcends anything we can imagine. Lord, we thank you and praise you.

By the prompting of your Spirit and in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, we make this prayer.  
Amen

### Talk for all (on video)

A couple of weeks ago we went to visit some relatives up north in Lancashire. We hadn't seen them since before lockdown. The relatives we were visiting had been to church on the Sunday morning. We heard that, during the service, the three-year-old pointed at the person playing the piano and asked his Mum and Dad, 'Is that God on the piano?' Maybe the person playing the piano was very good at it - who knows? It was certainly

a very good question for a three-year-old to ask - or even a thirty-year-old. Where is God, and does God hear us when we say our prayers to him?

When Jesus lived on Earth, he used to walk around the roads with his friends and disciples. Jesus used to teach them, and he used to heal people. When he was near the end of his life, Jesus knew that they would have to manage without him. So he told them that he would still be with them but not in a body where they could touch him.

He said, *'Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'* Some of you may be here by zoom, and some of you are here in person. But together there are more than two or three of us. So Jesus says he is with us. It's difficult to understand, but he hears us when we pray and when we sing hymns to him. We can also know what God wants to say to us when we read the Bible. Sometimes we get a strong feeling that Jesus is saying something to us through the Bible - or through what our Junior Church leader or the preacher says to us. Or it can even be that the person on the piano is playing so enthusiastically that we feel that God is in his or her piano playing. So yes, in a very strange way, that can be God on the piano.

**Hymn: StF20 Be still for the presence of the Lord is moving in this place**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKfyudrhGK4>

<p>1 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.</p>	<p>3 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.</p>
<p>2 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.</p>	<p>David J. Evans (b. 1957)</p>

## Readings

### **Matthew 16:24-27**

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup>What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? <sup>27</sup>For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*

### **Romans 10:1-10**

*Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup>For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. <sup>3</sup>Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not*

submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup> Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

<sup>5</sup> Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." <sup>6</sup> But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: <sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

### Hymn: StF254 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsBpM9IcBts>

<p>1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you ; Allelu-, alleluia : <i>Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia !</i></p> <p>2 Ask, and it shall be given unto you ; seek and ye shall find ; knock, and the door shall be opened unto you ; Allelu-, alleluia :</p>	<p>3 We shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord ; Allelu-, alleluia :</p> <p>Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)</p>
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### Sermon (on video)

I want to show you some pictures of galaxies.

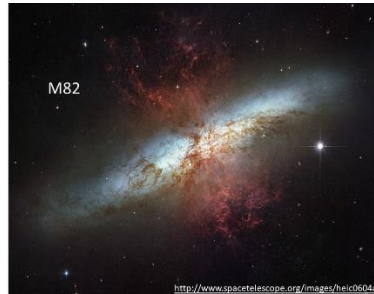


Here is a photo of two galaxies called M81 and M82. They are both about 12 million light years from Earth. This means that light would take 12 million years to reach us. So what we're seeing now shows them as they were 12 million years ago. Even at warp speed I don't think we can ever visit them. But they're actually quite close to us as the universe goes. In galaxy terms they are our neighbours. The two galaxies are much closer to each other than they are to us. So close, that they're actually orbiting around each other like the Moon orbits round the Earth.

I have close-up photos of each galaxy. This is M81.



M81 is a classic spiral. It's like our own Milky Way galaxy but a bit bigger. It has a giant black hole at its centre.



M82 looks quite different. Partly, it's because we see it edge-on through the disk so we can't see the spirals. It's sometimes called the Cigar Galaxy. It also looks different because it has hydrogen spewing out its centre – here seen in red – at 1000 miles per second. M82 is called a starburst galaxy. A few hundred million years ago M81 and M82 came close together. The gravitational forces between them triggered the formation of lots of stars in M82 – hence the name 'starburst'. The extreme activity produces a super-wind that heads off at high speed into intergalactic space.

I could sit and look at photos like this all day. They're so beautiful. The galaxies are so large, distant and remote. How puny and small we are in comparison to this vast action played out over hundreds of millions of years.

I could sit and contemplate these pictures all day. But if that were all I did I wouldn't be doing my job as an astrophysicist. Sitting in wonder does not achieve anything by itself. I have to get to work with my equations, write simulation programs, read what others have found out, and figure out what is going on with these galaxies. I have to do some hard thinking, publish my results and go to conferences to tell others. I have to be committed. As it's been said, 'Science is 1% inspiration, 99% perspiration'.

So there are two sides to science. It's an affair of the heart. Astrophysicists are motivated by the beauty and wonder of the universe. It's also an affair of the mind. We have to be committed, work hard, and apply our mental faculties.

I now want to turn to Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul drew out two similar aspects to being a Christian. Paul wrote,

*'If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'*

It's not quite the same as doing astrophysics – in fact it's very different - but there are the same two elements of heart and mind. On the one hand, believing with our heart. On the other hand, the action and commitment. The two go together, and both are necessary.

Some people think that believing is a matter of the mind. There is that to it. We assent to Christian doctrine. But belief is primarily of the heart. I know people who became Christians because they were convinced by logical argument. But this is rare. Most people become Christians because God becomes real to them in way that is beyond logical argument.

I look at pictures of galaxies and the beauty and wonder hits me in a way that is immediate and goes beyond conscious thinking. Even more so with God. God becomes real to us, and evokes a response within us. Faith is a gift from God. It's not a human accomplishment.

Then there's the other aspect. It's right that we contemplate God in our heart. But there's more to being a Christian. We should declare with our mouth that 'Jesus is Lord'. This sounds easy but there's a lot to it. First of all it means that we should come out in the open that we follow Jesus.

It's no good keeping quiet and hiding our faith from others. And by declaring openly that Jesus is our Lord, we are committing ourselves to making that true. If we say that Jesus is our Lord when he in fact is not Lord of our lives, then we make ourselves hypocrites and dishonour Jesus. This is a matter of action and commitment. It's something we can decide to do – or not. We may be motivated in our heart, but it is in our mind that we decide to make it so and act accordingly. To repeat what Paul wrote, *'If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'*

The context in which Paul wrote these words was his concern for his own people. As he wrote elsewhere, Paul described himself as a 'Hebrew of Hebrews'. Paul had been brought up and trained as a Pharisee. He couldn't work out why his own people did not recognise their own Messiah.

For Paul it was a tragedy. At the beginning of the passage we heard read, Paul analysed what was going wrong in the following way.

*For I can testify about them (Israelites) that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*

Paul testifies that Israelites are zealous for God – but they have not understood what God requires of them. Their zeal is not based on knowledge. What God requires of them is that they *'submit to God's righteousness'*. Instead they sought to construct their own righteousness. They wanted to do it by their own efforts.

Many pages have been written on what is meant by *'God's righteousness'* or *'the righteousness of God.'* For Paul, its main expression was in *'Christ crucified'*. About his preaching, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, *'I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.'*

Israelites found this an offence and a 'stumbling block' – that the ultimate expression of God's nature and righteousness was a man dying on a cross. For a people that wanted to establish their own righteousness, how could the crucified Christ be the pattern of their calling?

As Paul wrote, Israel *'did not submit to God's righteousness.'* Instead they, and we, are called to *"declare with our mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead..."*

Submission is at the centre of these words. To believe in our heart rather than by the effort of our mind is to acknowledge that faith and salvation come from what God does within us and what God does for us - not what we do ourselves. To declare *'Jesus is Lord'* is to say that we are not Lord of our own lives.

In his letter to the Romans, almost every time Paul talks about Jesus he refers to him as Lord Jesus, or Jesus Christ, or Lord Jesus Christ, or something similar. Only twice does he refer to him as Jesus without attaching the title Lord or Christ. And of course, 'Christ' is the title of the risen Jesus exalted to glory – thereby including the lordship of Jesus. For Paul, Jesus is the risen exalted Christ. He is Lord. Our proper place is to submit to him as our Lord.

I recently bought a new commentary on Romans. The commentary has 1027 pages. This is much longer than the actual Book of Romans which takes up only 15 pages in my Bible. This means that on average there are 68 pages of commentary for every page of the Bible. I must admit I'm really enjoying my new commentary. This may say I'm a theology nerd as well as a physics nerd.

What it also says is that Paul's letter to the Romans is a very complicated book. And the reason why it's so complicated is that in it Paul tries to express the inexpressible. Even Paul sometimes throws his hands in the air with frustration and amazement. In the next chapter, he cries out, *'Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.'*

The truth is that the righteousness of God is far more difficult to understand than any earthly knowledge – including quantum physics and astrophysics. At the same time it is far easier. God asks us to live his mysteries not understand them. And that is a call and an invitation to every one of us.

Philosophy and theology can actually be a barrier. Paul writes elsewhere, 'Where is the wise person? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?'

To that I say Amen.

Paul says that two things are required – that we believe with our hearts and declare with our lips. These are not hard things. God invites us all to the heavenly celebration by the grace of Christ Jesus who is our Lord and Saviour.

### Hymn: StF353 Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HHYt40whHQ>

<p>1 Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it, for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made. Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it; sun, moon and stars in heaven cry: Jesus is Lord! <i>Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!</i> <i>Praise him with alleluias, for Jesus is Lord!</i></p> <p>2 Jesus is Lord! Yet from his throne eternal in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's tree. Jesus is Lord! From him all life proceeding — yet gave his life a ransom, thus setting us free.</p>	<p>3 Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror, from death he rose; and all his foes shall own his name. Jesus is Lord! God sends his Holy Spirit to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.</p> <p>David John Mansell (b. 1936)</p>
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### Prayer

Lord, we thank you for the beauty of creation from the tiniest insect to the largest galaxy. You made it all. It proclaims your lordship as creator. Help us also to proclaim your lordship through the way we live and through your presence within us as your people. Abide in our hearts. Give us the gift of faith. Fill us with your Spirit. And give us the courage to own you as our Lord by the words we speak and by our actions.

Lord, we bring before the world in all its need. As the COP26 climate conference draws near, we hold before you politicians that have to make brave decisions. We ask that we who live in the rich privileged part of the world may spur on our leaders to protect the weak and recognise our responsibility for the changing climate. This is a precious planet – the only one we have. It is a gift from you. We share it with every person and every animal that inhabits its surface.

Lord, we bring before you our nation with the political and financial challenges it faces as we adjust to new circumstances after Covid and Brexit. Give us the courage to commit to ensuring that everybody has what they need for a fulfilling life – that nobody is in food or fuel poverty, or any other kind of poverty.

We hold before you the violence in our society – particularly the widespread violence against women that showed itself in the murder of Sarah Everard - and the violence and discrimination against other sectors of the population. Lord, we pray for justice for all. May all people be safe as they walk the streets and in all public spaces. May there be safety against hidden violence and aggression in the home.

Lord, we pray for our own communities and for people close to us as family and friends. Lord, there are people on our minds who suffer from illness, frailty or other adverse circumstances. We bring them before you in the

quietness of our minds. – a few moments of silence - Lord, you know who we think of. They are dear to you as they are dear to us. Bless them and lead them through difficult times.

Lord, we also pray for ourselves and bring before you the concerns that weigh on our minds. We bring before you both our joys and our sorrows. We thank you for the delights of life – of good times with those we love – for the emergence from COVID restrictions – and for all the things we enjoy now that lockdown has denied us.

Lord, above all we thank you for your goodness – that underpinning all the issues of life is the great reality that you love us, you died that we might live, and that you rose again to prepare a place for all in your kingdom - that your love will triumph over all that is wrong and evil. Lord, we thank you.

Let us now say together the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.

### 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

### Bless 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.

### Hymn: StF351 In Christ alone my hope is found

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljlsQQ269I4>

<p>1 In Christ alone my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song ; this Cornerstone, this solid Ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease ! My Comforter, my All in All, here in the love of Christ I stand.</p>	<p>3 There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain : then bursting forth in glorious Day up from the grave he rose again ! And as he stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me, for I am his and he is mine — bought with the precious blood of Christ.</p>
<p>2 In Christ alone ! — who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe ! This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to save : till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied for every sin on him was laid ; here in the death of Christ I live.</p>	<p>4 No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me ; from life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand ; till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand !</p>
<p>Keith Getty (<i>b.</i> 1974) and Stuart Townend (<i>b.</i> 1963)</p>	

### Blessing

May the love of God fill your mind, body and soul  
as you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord  
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.  
And the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with us all now and into eternal life.