

13th September 2020 6pm Being Present in His Presence

Service led by Anthony Manning, talk by Sam Whiteside

Bible readings by Hanne Manning and Felicity Hawke

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Introduction

[Anthony Manning:]

Good evening everyone, and welcome to this service of Evening Prayer coming virtually from St John's Church in Kenilworth. My name is Anthony; Hanne and Felicity will bring us our Bible readings and Sam will talk on the theme, 'Being present in His presence'.

So, we begin:

Preparation

[Anthony:] [Responses by Hanne Manning - intended to be said by all]

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ be with you

All and also with you.

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

All Let us rejoice and sing God's praise for ever.

We have come together in the name of Christ
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,
to hear and receive God's holy word,
to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Confession

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

**All Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.**

**In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.**

Absolution

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Prayer of thanksgiving

Blessed are you, sovereign God,
our light and our salvation;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You led your people to freedom
by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
May we who walk in the light of your presence
acclaim your Christ, rising victorious,
as he banishes all darkness from our hearts and minds.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

All **Blessed be God for ever.**

Opening prayer

The day is almost over, and the evening has come;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your Spirit come down upon us
to set us free to sing your praise
for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Breathe on us, Breath of God

So, as we come to Bible readings and focus on God speaking to us, let us sing together, *Breathe on us, breath of God.*

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| <p>1. Breathe on us, Breath of God,
Fill us with life anew,
That we may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.</p> <p>2. Breathe on us, Breath of God,
Until our hearts are pure,
Until with Thee we will one will,
To do and to endure.</p> | <p>3. Breathe on us, Breath of God,
Till we are wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of us
Glows with Thy fire divine.</p> <p>4. Breathe on us, Breath of God,
So shall we never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.</p> |
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Reading: Proverbs 8:27-31 [NIVUK 1984]

[Hanne Manning:]
Wisdom is speaking about the Lord God.

- ²⁷ I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he gave the sea its boundary
so that the waters would not overstep his command,
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.
³⁰ Then I was constantly at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
³¹ rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Reading: Joshua 8:1-8 [NIVUK 1984]

[Felicity Hawke:]
The second reading is from the book of Joshua chapter 8, verses 1 to 8.
Ai destroyed.

⁸ Then the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land. ² You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city.'

³ So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night ⁴ with these orders: 'Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don't go very far from it. All of you be on the alert. ⁵ I and all those with me will advance on the city, and when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them. ⁶ They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, "They are running away from us as they did before." So when we flee from them, ⁷ you are to rise

up from ambush and take the city. The LORD your God will give it into your hand. ⁸ When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the LORD has commanded. See to it; you have my orders.'

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

And now, over to Sam.

[Sam Whiteside:]

Good evening. I wonder how excited you are about this evening, and the rest of this week? I wonder, as we look at our subject for tonight, 'being present in His presence', whose presence? The presence of God. Our first reading can be called 'the call of wisdom'. "I was there!" Imagine actually being present in the mind of God at the beginning of the universe! "I was there" (Proverbs 8:27) There at the creation of the world! Watching as plans were carried out on such an awe-inspiring scale. Nothing in a film or on television or at the Olympic Games or a firework display or the World Cup could compare with being present at creation. Amazing spectacles! Sounds! Then going on in the story, how God applies the mind of humans to the wonder of inventions. Technology as we see it tonight on our screens. Science, aviation, medicine, the appreciation of art and music. Being there, being present when all these things are happening. Being there in a much more important way, perhaps, with the disciples and Jesus' ministry. There at the feeding of the 5,000 men (besides women and children). Seeing the lame walk and the blind see, being present at the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, or, going back a little, to the many battles in the Old Testament, and to see what we in 2020 can learn from those battles, especially as we face battles in our lives today: COVID, viruses, problems with sickness, and so on, and so on.

So I'm going to do my best to help you visualise a battle that took place for a little-known city built on a heap of stones. Now I learned a lot from evaluating what we can learn from our wise God, and so increase our wisdom. I hope I can take you there now. I leave you to follow in the Bible, Joshua [chapters] 7 and 8, but you don't necessarily have to read it now, but do promise to read it sometime this week. To set the picture, Joshua is now the leader of the children of Israel, Moses having been called home by God on the other side of the river Jordan. The Israelites have crossed over and taken the heavily fortified city of Jericho, we all know the story: the walls fell down flat and all that. But as the children of Israel advanced into the promised land, their next objective was the city of Ai. It was in the area of quarries, and was at a higher elevation than the land around. Do you see the picture, as if you were there? Joshua in his wisdom sends a recon party to investigate the defences - how the land lies (chapter 7 verse 2), and they report back: "Don't bother all the people, Joshua, there are in fact no worthwhile defences. Just send two or three thousand guys up there (chapter 7 verse 3). We would say today 'easy easy'.

Here we see Joshua's first mistake. Even though Ai seemed a very small problem to overcome, he didn't consult God about it. He listened to man and decided himself what he should do. Sounds familiar? At least he took the best insurance option and decided to send the highest estimate of the number of men needed, 3,000 (chapter 7 verse 4). Surprise, surprise, they were defeated, chased down from the higher ground and in the process lost 36 killed (chapter 7, verse 5). Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. And as we watch, guess what happened next? Joshua blames God! (chapter 7 verse 7). What has happened to this Premier League team (if you're football fans) who have been beaten by a minnow, not even in the league! What a humiliation. Why didn't Joshua stay on the other side, in the other division: on the other side of Jordan, instead of bringing us here? Then, as if to question God further, he says, "What will happen to your great Name?"

(chapter 7 and verse 9), and the defeated leader sinks into despair in the dust of the ground (chapter 7 verse 6). "Stand up!" says God (verse 10). At least Joshua was listening!

Do you see the picture, as if you were present? And have you ever been in a similar situation? Joshua, of course, gets up and listens to the wisdom that God imparts to him.

- Number one: why, oh why were they defeated? Well, we all know, looking back to the story of Jericho, that Achan committed the sin of actually stealing from God and hiding his treasure under his tent.
- And secondly, God imparts to Joshua, how to be an overcomer: clear, clear instructions as to how to overcome the enemy, get rid of the sin, which he did (rather strictly, rather severely), and then see the way ahead. He tells Joshua to involve all the people. You remember, the spy said "two or three thousand will do"? Oh, no. God says to Joshua "involve *all* the people, the whole army" (chapter 8 verse 1 and verse 3 as well). Now that's a lesson to us as well, as a family of believers, the body of Christ, that we should all be involved in the service of God as disciples of Jesus. God intends us all to be involved in the battles of life.

Then Joshua chose - Listen! 30,000 of his best fighting men (chapter 8 verse 3). Note that that was 10 times the number of the 3,000 Joshua had been advised to send by his spies. You know, God always knows the strength of the enemy we face. Then we have something rather wonderful: the first record of the ambush strategy. There's a lesson for us to learn here as well. Don't be afraid of new ways that God chooses for us, His followers, to overcome. You know, sometimes He says, "I want you to do it this way." Sometimes it is the old way. But sometimes He sees a new approach, which will be more successful. His wisdom, His wisdom tells us to send like Joshua, "Put your crack troops, the best fighting men, behind the city and tell them to wait for your signal." Gripping stuff now! See the picture? Still see the picture? God told Joshua to place the ambush also to the west of Ai with another 5,000 men to cut off any help which the men of Bethel might think about providing. After all, the men of Bethel were probably watching and covering the Israeli advance into the promised land, and they thought "If Ai falls, we're next." The wisdom of God, you see, was imparted to Joshua, and he obeyed.

I often wonder what Joshua would have thought of protecting his position from the rear from a possible ally, the men of Bethel. You know, Satan has many allies in this world. And we must listen to God's wisdom imparted to us to safeguard us as we follow to the promised land, to our inheritance, Heaven, as Jesus has made it possible. The plan, of course, was for the rest of the troops to approach Ai as before, then to retreat and draw the men of Ai out of the city. Then at the signal from Joshua, the ambush troops would move in and take the city. The wisdom of God in action - I like that! The wisdom of God in action. "Do what the Lord has commanded. See to it." And Felicity emphasised that when she read it, at the end there. "Do what the Lord has commanded. See to it." It worked! It worked! Of course it worked. God's plans always worked, and always will work. They always will.

Now at the beginning, we had a reading from Proverbs, whose author was Solomon of course. When God asked him what he wanted, when he could have asked for anything, he chose wisdom. God gave Solomon wisdom, and very great insight and breadth of understanding (recorded in 1 Kings 4 verse 29). God's Word says, "He who lacks wisdom only has to ask for it. And I will give it to him or her." (James 1:5). Now Joshua at least got some things right. He listened to God when he had a problem. He obeyed God when he was in trouble. He encouraged and defeated everything in his path in the end. But he also encouraged those who were downcast. Because it says in chapter 8 and verse 9, the next verse of our reading if we read on, "He spent the night before the battle with the people".

And when he had victory, based on God's wisdom and plans, he gave the glory to God (chapter 8 verse 30). He gave the glory to God: in fact he built an altar. He gave the glory to God, when he could have taken the adulation himself: "Look what I have done, look what we did!" No: "what God did."

So what can we learn from all this?

- Number one, always talk to God about our problems, however small they might be, or we might think they are. Ai was a small city, compared with Jericho.
- Listen to God's wisdom. Even if we think we know the answer.
- Be an encourager. I said that earlier: be an encourager to those who are finding life hard. Some of the people who were there, that Joshua met with and stayed with the night. may have been in the previous battle when they were defeated. And so, he was there to encourage them. He stayed with them.
- Then see the bigger picture, see the bigger picture. Being there, in His presence, being there, seeing the bigger picture.
- And give Him the glory for all the victories, the glory for what His wisdom achieves.

Then you and I can say as Solomon said in that reading from Proverbs. "Then I was a craftsman¹ at His side." Whose side? God's side. "I was filled with delight, day after day, rejoicing in His whole world, and delighting in mankind." (Proverbs 8:30-31). I can be present in His presence. I can be there, and witness the wisdom of our Creator God, of our sustaining God, of our victorious God every day, or as the Word says, day by day².

A prayer:

Heavenly Father, as we thank You that we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus, because we are forgiven people. But we have to go on. Please help us to be more Christ-like as we move forward in our lives. And by Your wisdom, extend Your Kingdom by the love and power of Your Holy Spirit living in us. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is within You." Father, we thank You for Jesus tonight. But we also thank You for Your wisdom that You impart to us, so that we can be on the victory side.
Thank You, Father. Amen.

[Anthony:]

Amen. Thank you Sam.

Creed

So, let us together, tell God how we believe in Him.

**All I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his 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;**

1 Berean Study Bible [BSB] translation

2 BSB translation again

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

Now, to help us focus even more on God, let us sing together *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*.

Hymn: Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise

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| <p>1. 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.</p> <p>2. Unresting, unchanging, 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.</p> | <p>3. 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 nought changeth Thee.</p> <p>4. Great Father of Glory, pure Father of Light
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render, O help us to see:
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.</p> <p>5. 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.</p> |
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Intercessions

[Anthony:]

So that is the God we come to pray to now. Let us pray.

In the power of the Spirit, and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father.

We pray for your Church throughout the world, especially in countries where it is very hard to be a Christian.

Here, we pray for Christopher and John our bishops and for all our clergy and church leaders. Please, may they help us to focus on what is important to you, Father.

All Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

We pray for leaders of countries around the world, especially as they oversee all the changes due to this coronavirus.

We pray too for leaders in Britain and Europe negotiating future arrangements, asking that they may come to good conclusions.

Lord, in your mercy
All **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those living in pain or fear. And lay before you now some we are particularly concerned for.

Please comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. Give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy
All **hear our prayer.**

Collect for the day (14th Sunday after Trinity)

Almighty God,
whose only Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence:
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

So, let us say together, and carefully and slowly, the prayer that Jesus taught us, so that we can mean each phrase.

All **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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Conclusion and blessing

So let us bless each other in the words of the grace.

**All The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.**

Thank you for joining with us. And we close tonight with the hymn, *Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah*, as we ask God's guidance for the days ahead.

Amen.

Hymn: Guide me O thou Great Jehovah

1. Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.
2. Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.
3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee;
I will ever give to Thee.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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Guide me O thou Great Jehovah – Author: William Williams 1717-1791 (published in 1745) Translated by Peter Williams 1722-1796 (published in 1771) Sung to Cwm Rhondda by John Hughes 1873-1932, tune written in 1907
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