

# Christ Church Woodley 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Jesus spoke to the people saying,  
I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Wherever we are, in church or at home, the light of Jesus shines into our hearts as we worship him.

## **Hymn StF 24 Come now is the time to worship** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1jB0IDWEHI>

Come, now is the time to worship. Come, now is the time to give your heart.  
Come, just as you are to worship. Come, just as you are before your God, come.  
One day every tongue will confess you are God, one day every knee will bow.  
Still, the greatest treasure remains for those who gladly choose you now.  
Come, now is the time to worship. Come now is the time to give your heart.  
Come, just as you are to worship. Come, just as you are before your God, come.  
One day every tongue.....  
Come, now is the time to worship.....

Brian Doerksen

## **Prayer**

Lord we thank you for the privilege of being joined together in your Spirit. You shine into our hearts. When the darkness threatens, we have your light to guide and protect us. We are not left alone. We have your promise that we will in the end be gathered to you, embraced by your love and enfolded in your peace.

Lord, we bring to you the confusion of these times – the uncertainties and frustrations accompanying the Covid virus – the separation from those we love – the restrictions that stop us doing things we enjoy.

Help us to see our lives in the context of your love. Out of your own pain on the cross you stretch out your arms to us. You are always willing to forgive us for our mistakes and our sins. You know the stresses and strains of our lives. Where our lives are broken you want to heal us. Lord, may this hour be a time of healing and restoration when we find again our rest in you as your beloved.

Lord, we thank you that we can make these prayers assured of your self-giving love and the pleasure you find in our worship, our faith, and our dependence on you.

In the name of Jesus we lay our lives before you. *Amen*

## **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day 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 forever more. Amen.

## **All age talk: The Light of the World**

It's a long time since I was eight years old. I've forgotten most things, but some things stick in my mind. Sometimes little things that don't seem important but I still remember them. One of these is taking a torch with me when I went to bed. I would go down under the covers of my bed so it was totally dark – no light at all. Then I would switch on the torch and it would create a world of my own where nobody else could see me – and I had my own source of light. I remember having a very special torch that shone in different colours. I've brought a torch with me this morning. It's not the same torch I had as a child but it's very similar. Let me show you why it's special. If you're here at church you should be able to see what the torch does. If you're on zoom you may also be able to see it. If you're reading this script you'll just have to imagine what I say.

When I switch it on you might think it's just an ordinary torch. Let me shine it on this paper – you'll see the paper illuminated exactly as you would expect. Now let me press the on-switch again. You'll now see that the light from the torch is blue. When I shine it on this piece of white paper, it now looks blue. Imagine doing this under the sheets of your bed where everything is dark and there is no other light. The white sheets now look completely blue. If I press the switch again the light turns green and the piece of paper now appears green. Press again and everything turns red. Press again and we're back to white.

So a piece of paper or the bed sheets are not always white. They can be blue, or green or red, depending on the light that shines on them.

Jesus says,

I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Jesus is like a torch that shines on us and our lives. Light from Jesus is the light of love. When he shines into our lives, we know that we are loved. We know that love is what matters. Love should illuminate our actions. And we learn to see more clearly the love that other people have for us.

There are other lights shining into the world. Sometimes the light they shine is full of anger or bitterness or greed. If these other lights take us over, we also become full of anger, bitterness or greed, or other things that make life unhappy for us and for others. At other times there are no lights, and life is taken over by darkness.

Let us hold onto Jesus as our light. Let us allow the Light of Jesus shine into our lives, and shine through our lives to others.

## **Junior Church Children's Hymn STF 61: Our God is a Great Big God**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt4ssBmX4y0>

*Our God is a great big God,  
our God is a great big God,  
our God is a great big God,  
and he holds us in his hands.*

He's higher than a skyscraper,  
and he's deeper than a submarine.  
He's wider than the universe,  
and beyond my wildest dreams.  
And he's known me and he's loved me  
since before the world began.  
How wonderful to be a part  
of God's amazing plan!

Jo Hemming and Nigel Hemming

## **Following the hymn, we bless each other as we continue to learn of Jesus**

### **Introduction to the readings**

As we know from the gospels, Jesus not only taught and preached. He also healed. The gospels are full of stories of Jesus healing people. There seems to be no doubt that Jesus was known for his ability heal. If you read through the gospels, you might get the impression that Jesus specialised in particular kinds of healing. He seems to have specialities, like a consultant in a hospital – casting out evil spirits, curing leprosy, and giving sight to the blind. When Jesus healed, it was more than simply making people better – it had a symbolic meaning. Casting out evil spirits demonstrated Jesus's power over evil. Curing leprosy symbolised ritual purity – being made clean – so important in Judaism of the time. Returning sight to the blind symbolised the healing of spiritual blindness.

Our gospel reading is from John chapter 9. We will hear the beginning and the end of the chapter. The beginning, verse 1-7, tells how Jesus heals a blind man. The Pharisees were very upset by this. They knew what the healing symbolised and what Jesus was claiming about himself by opening the eyes of the blind. The complaints by the Pharisees and Jesus's response are told in verses 8-34. These verses could be the subject of another sermon. But instead we skip to verses 35-41 where Jesus relates physical blindness to spiritual blindness. These verses end with the Pharisees taking offence and saying to Jesus, "What, are we blind too?" You can fill in your own answer to that. In contrast, the healed man ends up confessing, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Jesus.

The other reading is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I'll speak about this in a moment with a focus on Paul's prayer for the Ephesians where he says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened."

## **Reading John 9: 1-7, 35-41**

### **Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind**

<sup>1</sup> As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

<sup>3</sup> "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

<sup>6</sup> After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. <sup>7</sup> "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

### **Spiritual Blindness**

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

<sup>36</sup> "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

<sup>38</sup> Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

<sup>40</sup> Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

<sup>41</sup> Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

## **Reading Ephesians 1:15-23**

### **Thanksgiving and Prayer**

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

## Hymn: 651 Lord of life, we come to you <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zro80EwVGA>

Lord of life, we come to you.  
Lord of all, our Saviour be.  
Come to bless and to heal  
with the light of your love.

Catherine Walker (b.1958)

### Sermon: Seeing with the eyes of the heart

We live in difficult times. The Covid second wave is growing. We face the possibility that Covid and its economic effects may be with us a long time. The possibility of a disorderly Brexit stares us in the face. Political institutions creak at the seams. Looking further ahead, action is needed now to avert climate disaster.

At times like this where do we look for hope? The answer is we look to Jesus. In times of incoming darkness, we look to him. In the gospel reading we hear Jesus saying, "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

When Jesus said this, I expect he had in mind the cross and the persecution that the disciples would experience afterwards. But I think it applies more broadly. Whenever we face darkness, Jesus is the light. It can be in the face of illness, loss or family tragedy. Jesus is the light that shines to give us hope and assurance that there is something beyond the present or coming darkness.

This seeing something beyond brings us to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Often when Paul wrote to one of his churches it was because something was going wrong. Not so in Ephesus - they were sailing along nicely. He begins his letter by giving thanks for their faith and for their love. Everything was going well but he had a further prayer for them: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Paul knew that however much the Ephesians knew now, there was more. Paul prayed that their eyes opened to three things:

Firstly, that they might understand the hope to which they were called. What they saw now was a taste of what is to come. As Paul describes it elsewhere in his letter, what we have now is a pledge, a guarantee of more to come. Paul called it a deposit, like the deposit put down when buying a car. It secures the promise of full payment to come.

Secondly, Paul prayed that they may know the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. I'm pleased to say that I have yet to receive any inheritance, simply because my father is still very much alive at an age of 94. Assuming that a time comes when I receive an inheritance it won't be because I deserve it. It will be because I am my father's son. So it is with the inheritance we receive through Jesus from God our Father. The inheritance comes to us entirely because he has died for us, and risen again to glory. This verse actually is a little ambiguous and puts a different slant on inheritance. Its straightforward meaning is not that we receive an inheritance, but that we the church are the inheritance that Jesus received on his ascension to glory. There are two kinds of inheritance in the letter to Ephesians, the inheritance we receive from him, and the inheritance Jesus receives – which is the church. It's extraordinary that we should receive an inheritance of which we are unworthy. It's even more extraordinary that, despite our failings and unworthiness, we the church are deemed fit to be the reward that Jesus received on entering glory. It is often said that Paul's letter to the Ephesians has a high view of the church – indeed it does. Paul reinforces this a few verses later when he ends his prayer for the Ephesians by writing of the

church as 'the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.' We are the Body of Christ filled with fullness of Christ as your body is filled with fullness of who you are.

Thirdly, Paul prays that the Ephesians should know Christ's incomparably great power for us who believe. Paul explains further: That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. Paul's prayers for the Ephesians, and therefore for us, are not empty prayers without substance. They are made real by the power of Christ's resurrection and glorification. This is our assurance that Paul's prayers will be fulfilled.

Paul prays that the Ephesians may know these three things. He prays that they might know them not by rational argument or just because they read it in his letter. Paul prays that they may see these things with the 'eyes of their hearts', that they and we should know these things at the deepest level of our being. In the previous verse Paul writes that these things are received through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. It is God's own action within us through his Spirit that enlightens the eyes of our hearts.

We can read these words of Paul in the Bible and say yes I believe them. But only when the Spirit of wisdom and revelation opens the eyes of our hearts do they settle into our souls and change the way we see and live life.

Children get excited about school projects – maybe about Egyptians or dinosaurs or King Henry VIII. In her first year at school, I know of one young girl who was told that her project was going to be on space. She came home and told her Mum with a shrug of her shoulders – 'but we did space at nursery'. What more was there to learn?

As a scientist I have studied space, or more correctly astronomy, for more than four decades. And I can tell you, there is always more to learn. We know only a fraction of what there is to be known. The same goes for our learning and development as Christians. There is always more to learn. If we think we know it all we are mistaken.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "May your eyes be enlightened". Despite the strength of their faith and their love - Paul gave thanks for their maturity as Christians - there was still more to be seen. And even what we think know and see, we often see only with the eyes of our mind. We need to go further to see it with the eyes of our hearts.

To return to the gospel story: the Pharisees knew the scriptures as well as anyone. They studied it all their lives and were recognised as teachers of Israel. But still they could be blind. They knew enough to have the head knowledge of God's promises to Israel. They should have recognised the Messiah. But the eyes of their hearts were closed.

In contrast, the blind man who was untrained in the scriptures recognised the Messiah. At the end of the chapter, after a fruitless argument with the Pharisees, Jesus caught up with him. Jesus said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

May we be like the blind man. May we acknowledge that we have much to learn. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened that we may know in our experience the presence and reality of Jesus who said, to the crowds, the disciples, and to us,

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

## Hymn: 447 Jesus, be the Centre <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kq1AJxftCk>

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|---|---|
| 1 Jesus, be the centre,<br>be my source, be my light,<br>Jesus.   | 3 Jesus, be my vision,<br>be my path, be my guide,<br>Jesus.  |
| 2 Jesus, be the centre,<br>be my hope, be my song,<br>Jesus.<br><br><i>Be the fire in my heart,<br/>be the wind in these sails ;<br/>be the reason that I live,<br/>Jesus, Jesus.</i> | <br><i>Be the fire in my heart,<br/>be the wind in these sails ;<br/>be the reason that I live,<br/>Jesus, Jesus.</i> |
|   | 4 Jesus, be the centre,<br>be my source, be my light,<br>Jesus.   |

Michael Frye

## Prayers

When we pray, we bring our concerns into the light of God's presence.

As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

*Let us pray.*

A St Paul wrote, we do not know what we ought to pray for. Send your Spirit to help us in our weakness, to intercede for us and pray through us.

Lord, we bring to you the present Covid situation, holding before you those who are seriously ill even to the point of death – the families who watch on and those left behind. Lord, we pray for all who are anxious about their jobs and how to provide for their families. We pray for our leaders and the scientists who advise them – give them clear eyes to see what must be done and how to protect the weak.

We pray Lord for your church which is the Body of Christ. May the eyes of our hearts be opened that we may see who we are, the richness of our inheritance, and the hope to which we are called. We ask that the Spirit of Christ should fill this church. Through us may the love of Christ touch this community. Lord sustain our worship and maintain our fellowship. May this be a time when we learn what really matters and learn new ways of following you.

We hold before you individuals known to us that need special care. May your love be known to them. May we know how to support them. In our hearts we silently name them before you. Lord, we ask your blessing upon them.

Lord, there are many things we should pray for. Where people are in need, you know about them, even if we forget them. You know all the forgotten of this world. You see into all our hearts. Lord make good our prayers where we fall short.

We make these prayers in the knowledge that your love for us sent you to the cross. The power of your resurrection and ascension to glory is the same power at work in the world through your Spirit.

Lord, in thankfulness we commit ourselves to you that you might work in us for the coming of your kingdom.

In the name of Jesus, we make these prayers. *Amen.*

**Hymn: 351 In Christ alone** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDTcw0t2JA8>

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 !

Keith Getty (*b.* 1974) and Stuart Townend (*b.* 1963)

**Blessing**

May the Light of Christ shine into hearts and lead us home to his glorious kingdom.  
And may the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with us now and into eternity