

West Sussex Area Ministry, United Reformed Church (Billingshurst, Petworth and Pulborough)

Bulletin for Sunday 23rd August 2020

Good morning! Welcome to the service that we can all share together, no matter where we are or what technology we do or don't have. It's good to be able to share together and think of each other.

Hymn: Praise the Lord, ye heavens adore him (R&S 116)

Prayer: God of creation, heaven and earth show us
just a fraction of who you are...
we are amazed; and we praise you.
In Christ - Emmanuel - God with us in love -
we glimpse more of your identity; and we praise you.
May your living Spirit lead us towards you,
teach us about you, and help us to praise you.
So, as we worship this morning
help us to reflect on who you are...
and what that means to us today.
We ask your blessing on everything we do,
and everything we bring to you or give in your service,
today and every day. In Jesus' name, Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Readings: Matthew chapter 16: verses 13-20

Reflection: Is Jesus just wondering what people are saying about him? In part, perhaps; but the fact that he brings the subject up here, in Caesarea Philippi, suggests that there is more to it than that.

The city was named after Caesar - the Roman emperor. In fact it was not just named after him, but directly and deliberately in honour of the emperor, Augustus Caesar. This was the local seat of Roman power, and Caesar was very much 'Lord' here. This is the background to Jesus' questions: who are people saying that I am? and who do you say that I am?

You may remember that a little earlier, when Jesus had come to the disciples in a boat in a storm, walking on the water, they had worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'. Now Peter says something similar - not in the middle of a lake, where nobody could possibly hear, but close to a major Roman centre, where the emperor was, quite literally, worshipped. Jesus' questions are indeed about how people see and understand him... they are also about loyalty and belonging. Who is to be worshipped? Jesus is building on the foundations of John the Baptist, of Elijah and the prophets who came before him, to draw people back to God - away from worship of Caesar and all other competing loyalties.

Jesus has a different kingdom, with very different values and priorities - the rule of God, who is love. So who do we say Jesus is? And where do our loyalties and our worship lie - not just on Sundays but in our everyday lives and decisions?

Hymn: From heaven you came, helpless babe (R&S 522)

Prayer: God of compassion, deep beyond our understanding,
whose arms are open wide to those in need,
we pray for all your children everywhere:
for those in need of healing, or feeding, or protection;
for those we have read about,
heard about or seen on the news;
for those close to us:
both those we love, and those we find hard to love;
for our communities.... and for ourselves...
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Hymn: O love of God, how strong and true (R&S 100)

May we grow more aware, day by day,
of who Christ is to us;
and may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us and with all those we love
this week and every week. Amen

There will be an evening service - Sunday at Six - on Zoom this evening; contact me for an invitation. All very welcome, either online or using an ordinary landline phone.

Preachers for the next couple of weeks (until the Messenger is out):
Billingshurst: Sunday 23rd Jon Ogan; Sunday 30th John Jennings
Pulborough: Sunday 23rd Anne Lewitt; Sunday 30th Karen Kelland
Petworth: Sunday 23rd Maureen Purser; Sunday 30th tba

Anne Lewitt