



The Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit

Sunday 30th August 2026

BIG Sunday

"I AM who I AM"

Welcome:

A very warm welcome to our Big Sunday worship whether you are at home worshipping on your own, in one of our church congregations, or on social media. As we join together today we reflect on how we see God, and what effect that has on our interactions with others. I hope it will be a meaningful time for you!

Opening words:

We begin today where we ended last week as we spent time thinking about who we say Jesus is. Who is Jesus for you? Today online, in the video, and in the congregations, we will hear some testimonies, some of which are reproduced here:

WHO IS GOD /JESUS TO ME?

Quentin Stephen:

I grew up in the Church of England. At the age of nine I became a chorister and was required to attend three services on a Sunday, Sung Eucharist, Mattins, and Evensong. As a consequence, I soon knew the liturgy off by heart. I was encouraged to attend confirmation classes and at the age of eleven was confirmed by the Bishop of Bedford. I can still place myself in the moment when he placed his hands on top of my head. I had a strange sensation. By the age of thirteen I decided that I needed to leave the choir and sit with the congregation so I could participate in worship as a learner, rather than a performer.

By the age of sixteen I had listened to a lot of sermons and they raised many questions that I wanted to know the answers to. As a young adult I continued to question many things that other people didn't seem concerned about.

I met my wife, Shirley, through the Methodist Youth Club. Occasionally, one youth club went to share fellowship with another, and that is how we met. We have been married for fifty years now. Whilst we are temperamentally very different, God has guided us through the trials and tribulations we have experienced. He has blessed our relationship in many ways, not least by giving us two wonderful children, Benjamin and Rachel.

God has guided me throughout my working life as a school-teacher and subject adviser. One secondary school I worked in was particularly challenging, and I had to stop and pray each day as I entered the school gate. As a subject adviser, I was required on one occasion, to observe and report on a teacher that the Head-teacher wanted to dismiss. I found no evidence to support this intention, and was not popular as a result.

As a Local Preacher, God guides me in preparing each service I lead. I very rarely use the same material twice, because it isn't good enough. I feel it is like offering stale bread to feed the congregation. Although I have been preaching since 1986, every service I prepare takes a long time. I am just as reliant on the power of the Holy Spirit now, as I ever was. Thanks be to God.

Dee Moden:

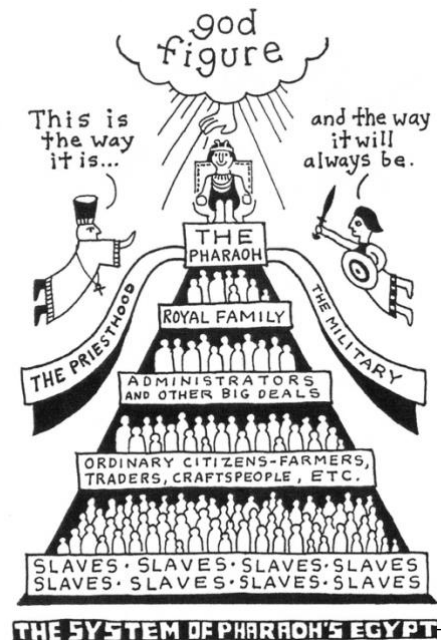
For me, God through Jesus, is the one who has been beside me all of my life – a still small voice, a calm in the storm, and the arms that carry me in times of trouble.

He is the one who is faithful and true, my guide, my Saviour and my friend.

As it says in Hymn 18 in Singing the Faith, which based on part of Psalm 46, one of my favourite Psalms.

"Be still and know that I am God – It is the Lord that saves and heals – In you O Lord I put my trust"

And so much more beside.



From Manna & Mercy © 1992 Daniel W. Erlander. Reproduced with permission "for one-time nonprofit use in bulletins etc."

Facebook:

- My peace, my comfort, my reason
- The son of God, who defeated sin and death
- A man who gave the world a unique way of seeing the Divine Other - as a Loving parent
- My master and very best friend
- Wisdom or the Word

And so we celebrate Jesus: Lord, King, Love and Life:

Hymn 348 He is Lord, he is Lord

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_jMx7HYUvg&list=RDW_jMx7HYUvg&start_radio=1

He is Lord, He is Lord;
He is risen from the dead, and he is Lord;
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord.

[He is King, he is king;
he will draw all nations to him, he is King;
and the time shall be when the world shall sing
That Jesus Christ is King.

He is love, he is love;
He has shown through his life that he is love;
all his people sing with one voice of joy,
That Jesus Christ is love.

He is life, he is life;
he has died to set us free and he is life;
And he calls us all to live evermore,
For Jesus Christ is life.]

Prayers of Adoration and Confession (Revd Derek Grimshaw):

Almighty and eternal Father, we bow before you in reverence. You are the King of kings and Lord of lords. You have dominion over everything in the heavens and on earth. Yet you still care about even the smallest details of our lives. That's why we want to rejoice in you every day. You are worthy!

Omnipotent Father, because of your mercy and grace you sent your son Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. As a father you demonstrated a love unlike anything this world has to offer. Because of that love, we will get to spend eternity with you. Lord, thank you for this ultimate gift. Without you we would have no hope. we love you with all our heart, soul, and mind! Thank you for your faithfulness that endures forever.

You asked for our hands, that you might use them for your purpose.

We gave them for a moment, then withdrew them, for the work was hard.

You asked for our mouths to speak out against injustice.

we gave you a whisper that we might not be accused.

You asked for our eyes to see the pain of poverty.

we closed them, for we did not want to see.

You asked for our lives, that you might work through us.

we gave but a small part, that we might not get too involved.

Lord, forgive our calculated efforts to serve you—

only when it is convenient for us to do so,

only in those places where it is safe to do so,

and only with those who make it easy to do so.

Father, forgive us, renew us, and send us out as usable instruments, that we might take seriously the meaning of carrying your cross. Amen.

adapted from The Worship Sourcebook, ©2004, Faith Alive Christian Resources

Hymn 274 Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewlpRdDU9Q8&list=RDewlpRdDU9Q8&start_radio=1

Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice,
you became nothing, poured out the death.
Many times I've wondered at your gift of life
And I'm in that place once again
And I'm in that place once again.

*And once again I look upon
the cross where you died
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside,
Once again I thank you,
Once again I pour out my life.*

Now you are exalted to the highest place,
King of the heavens, where one day I'll bow.
But for now, I marvel at your saving grace,
and I'm full of praise once again
and I'm full of praise once again.

Refrain

Thank you for the cross
Thank you for the cross,
Thank you for the cross, my Friend. (x2)
Refrain

As we join together today we're reflecting on how our image of God affects what we believe and how we respond to others.

There've been many things which have shaped our beliefs over the years. One of the important ones, as we spoke about last week, is our idea of who Jesus is - and we've heard wonderful testimonies of that today of that, you will have your own story of who Jesus is for you - but as we'll see in our gospel reading, when our understanding of Jesus differs from who Jesus really is, we get into trouble!

For the Jewish people their understanding of God was rooted in the revelation of the divine name to Moses in the story of the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3. Maria is going to lead us in that reading.

Reading **Exodus 3:1-15 (Mrs Maria Martin)**

Hymn 20 **Be still for the presence of the Lord**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOCfPjLOvC4&list=RDxOCfPjLOvC4&start_radio=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

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

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.

Reading **Matthew 16:21-28 (Mrs Pippa Cook)**

Reflection: **Rev Neil Vels**

I love Peter! He's such an impulsive follower of Jesus: always the first to put up his hand, to step out the boat, to proclaim Jesus as Messiah! There is much that we can learn from him in our own cautious following of Jesus. Maybe we need to take more risks!

Last week we heard how Peter proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, as many of us have done and have testified to today. The problem, as I read the text, is that I'm not sure whether Peter really understood what he meant when he proclaimed Jesus as the Christ.

I think, looking at today's reading, he was really looking for someone who would be a warrior to inaugurate God's kingdom by violently attacking the Romans, he expected himself to be part of the army enforcing it. Peter didn't like it very much when Jesus said, actually, I'm going to there to die. Peter rejects the Jesus way, and Jesus, in responding, suggests that his response is of satan, let me expand on that.

ha satan is a Hebrew expression which is not necessarily a proper noun. Yes, we use it as a name, but the expression also means the tempter. Peter's words are tempting Jesus away from his mission, and this is what Jesus rejects.

But I also want to suggest - we often speak of the anti-christ - I want to suggest, and these thoughts come from US Methodist scholar Walter Wink who suggests that anything that goes against Jesus' plan is anti-christ.

At this moment Peter is the anti-Christ. When you or I go against what Jesus wants we are acting as the anti-christ. This is why it's so important to have a clear understanding of who Jesus is, especially as the Son of God.

Let's go back to Exodus for a moment. The story that Maria read from Exodus this morning is one of the defining narratives of the Jewish faith story: Who is God? "Who do you say I am?". The story goes back to Moses and the revelation of the Divine Name which I'll get back to in a moment.

Now remember Moses, although a Jew, was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, and would have grown up in an Egyptian culture, surrounded by an Egyptian understanding of God and enjoying all the good things that Pharaoh's wealth brought.

As the Jews reflect on this as part of the oppressed slaves in Egypt there is a different perspective. Daniel Erlander, in his booklet "Manna and Mercy," describes the oppressive system of Pharaoh's Egypt like this (See diagram at top of sheet):

There is a Pharaoh who is in charge, his leadership is endorsed by the god-figure (Whatever that looks like) which is proclaimed by the priests as "right" theology, and then enforced by the military. So we have Pharaoh on top of the pyramid, all the other people below with varying degrees of privilege, until we end up with the slaves - the oppressed - right at the bottom of the pile.

God who appears to Moses in the burning bush engages with this picture of how the world works and says it is not to be so: "I have heard the cries of my people". I am not the god endorsing the king, the god empowering oppression, I'm not the god giving a theological backing to a king's power. I am the God who wants to bring my people out from under the hand of the Egyptians to a land flowing with milk and honey.

Now Moses is cheeky, he wants a name, and so God responds, "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be" according to your footnote. But perhaps a better translation is "I am being, the source of life, the becoming one, the one who brings into creation. Life itself! The Hebrew used here is what we call the Tetragrammaton, the four letters, transliterated into YHWH. You may have heard is spoke as Yahweh/Yahweh or Jehovah. We don't know how it was pronounced because for the Jewish people this name was so holy it was not to be spoken. And you will find it printed in your Bibles as LORD with capital letters

But it is clear in the divine name and in God's response to those living in slavery that the purpose and intention of God is to set people free. This is what Yahweh calls Moses to.

This is what Jesus calls his followers to.

You see, by the time of Jesus all that had changed is that the wealthy Jewish religious leaders in collaborating with Rome had replicated Pharaoh's model of oppression. Just by the way, the people Jesus spoke to most of all were the three bottom layers of that pyramid: ordinary people in debt, landless day labourers and widows and slaves.

Jesus as the Son of God wants to continue the work of Yahweh, the one who hears the cries of the oppressed and leads them to freedom. The way to do that, Jesus knows, is not to create another totalitarian regime with Jesus at the top of the pile - which seems to be what Peter wants. Peter wants a warrior who will replace Rome as emperor. And this is where Jesus tells Peter he's got it wrong. It's always tempting to choose the way of power and strength, but the way to true freedom is only through sacrifice.

Now, what does this have to do with us?

The reality is that the oppressive system of Pharaoh's Egypt is still around wherever people are oppressed. During the apartheid years this is what the South Africa government looked like: Prime minister and president at the top, a philosophical system that appeared to represent God with the Dutch Reformed Church as a state religion endorsing a particular theological world view, and a conscripted army enforcing it, ensuring that everybody - especially the oppressed right at the bottom of the heap - stayed in their place.

Look at America today: the same system, President at the top, endorsed by a particular section of the Christian Church, the mythology around the assassination attempts on trump, with an increasingly empowered and militarised ICE keeping migrants in their place (Preferably out of the country).

And the same is true wherever we see oppression: An autocratic leader, a religious system which supports him, a military to enforce it. It was true of Hitler's Germany and is true, dare I say, of Israel today.

Who we say Jesus is directly affects how we respond to this pyramid. If Jesus is on the side of the rich and wealthy, our theology, prayers, and expression of Christianity will support, even inadvertently, the oppression of the poor. And it's tempting to believe this because it's a theology which gives me what I want,

But if we believe that Jesus is not a warrior king, but rather a suffering servant who hears the cries of the poor and oppressed and stands at the base of the pyramid with them, then we have no option to stand at the base of the

pyramid with Jesus and with the poor and excluded. To, as Jesus tells Peter, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him, even to the point of losing our lives.

We may not have such a clearly defined national pyramid with a priesthood and army enforcing it here - it may have been so in years past! - but I wonder where we could find similar structures locally? Any system really that is designed to keep people out, whether through discrimination, employment opportunities or anything else and has a philosophical principal that supports it and militant enforcers, officially recognised or not.

If we call Jesus the son of God, the one who hears the cries of the slaves in Egypt, who proclaims themselves as life, Jesus who offers himself for our sake, what does it mean for our faith?

Are we, like Peter who so freely confesses, yet inadvertently does the work of the devil, becoming a stumbling block to all that God wants to do. Or are we willing to go to the cross for the sake of others? Does our understanding of Jesus and God offer life to others, allowing them to be, to become all they can be? Or does it keep them at the bottom of the pile

It's not an easy journey as we will see in the coming weeks as we journey with Moses leading the people out of Egypt. He himself had to change the way he saw God, but it is the way to life. I pray that all our understandings of God and Jesus will grow reflect those ideals ever more fully.

Shall we pray.

Prayers: Intercessions (Mrs Sandra Simm)

Let us pray ...

Loving God,
you are the God who sees the suffering of your people,
who hears their cries,
who knows their pain,
and who comes down to set them free.

Forgive us when we have distorted pictures of you which lead us to distorted ways of living with one another.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for the nations of our world:
a world where power is used to control rather than to serve,
where politics are driven by fear rather than hope,
where people are treated as problems rather than as your children.

Give wisdom and courage to those who hold political power and help them to make decisions which protect life and dignity, allowing all people to flourish. We pray that they will resist the temptation to build their own security at the expense of others.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for those whose lives are so drastically affected by war, poverty, oppression, hunger and injustice.
Where people are displaced, give them shelter.
Where people are exploited, bring justice.
Where people live in fear, bring peace.
Where people have lost hope, bring others to help them build lives where they can thrive again.
Help us to be not merely observers of suffering,
but people willing to give something of ourselves to help give life to others.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for your Church.
Make us a people and a Church who give life:
a Church which welcomes rather than excludes,
heals rather than wounds,
serves rather than dominates,
and gives generously rather than holding on to what it has.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

When we feel inadequate, frightened or uncertain about what you ask of us,
When following you requires sacrifice, keep us from turning away.
When loving others costs us something, give us generosity.
When doing what is right is difficult, give us courage.
Help us to remember Jesus, who was not tempted to turn away from the cross and teach us that sometimes giving life to others means giving something of our own lives away.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for those who are facing sacrifice today—
those caring for someone they love; strengthen them when they are weary,
those working for justice; encourage them when their work seems difficult,
those serving their communities and standing alongside the vulnerable; remind them that acts of love, however small, are never wasted.
and those whose faithfulness is costing them dearly; remind them of your words 'I will be with you'.

Where we are called to sacrifice,
help us to recognise not simply what we are giving up,
but also the life that may be released through our giving.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Finally, Lord, we bring before you those situations and people known only to us and we remember them now in a few moments of quiet ...

We ask all our prayers through Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us
and calls us to follow him.

Amen.

We say together the 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.

Hymn 287 When I Survey

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9eCUqz_x5A&list=RDZ9eCUqz_x5A&start_radio=1

When I Survey the wondrous cross,
on which the prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,
spreads o'er his body on the tree;
then I am dead to all the globe,
and all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;

love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Blessing (Neil):

Beloved, when the path is easy and when the path is rough, when God calls through a burning bush or a still, small voice or a loving rebuke, remember: you are not alone. May God bless you with the courage and humility to accept God's call and with the assurance that if God calls you, God will equip you. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2026.