

## Service Sheet Circuit 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020 – Stephen Stokes

### Opening prayer

Heavenly Father, we meet once more to worship your holy name and to praise you with all that we have to offer. You are rich in love and you're slow to anger. Your name is great and your heart is kind. And for all your goodness, we will keep on singing, 10,000 reasons for our hearts to find. **Amen**

**Song:** [10,000 Reasons \(Bless the Lord\) Matt Redman](#)

### Prayer:

God of wonders, whose creation astounds us, and whose majesty beholds us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of life, whose love enfolds us, and whose spirit fills us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of glory, whose beauty surrounds us, and whose arms protect us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of joy, whose sunrise wakens us, and whose sunset amazes us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of hope, whose promise sustains us, and whose power upholds us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of love, whose patience humbles us, and whose touch can heal us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of peace, whose gentleness calms us, and whose tenderness soothes us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of eternity, whose love has enriched us, and whose promise has cheered us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

God of forgiveness, whose Son has redeemed us, and whose grace has saved us,  
*we worship your holy name.*

O Lord, our rock and our redeemer, we offer you our praise and our worship. **Amen**

**Song:** [O Lord, my rock and my redeemer](#) – Sovereign Grace Music

**Readings** - [Matthew 21: 23-32](#)

- [Philippians 2: 1-11](#)

### Reflection:

**Sketch:** [I look down on him](#) (The Frost Report 1966)

In 1966, on a television programme called the Frost Report, a famous, iconic sketch took place starring John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett. The sketch, which lasted less than two minutes, was part of a sarcastic review of the British class system. At the time it ruffled a few feathers and caused quite a stir, but also raised a few hearty laughs from the studio audience and television viewers.

John Cleese, tall and upright in appearance and demeanour, represented the upper class; Ronnie Barker, of average height, represented the middle class, and Ronnie Corbett, short in stature, represented the working class. Each in turn described their social advantages and disadvantages, and contrasted them with their neighbours, an effect highlighted by the actors' relative heights, as they looked either downwards or upwards as they addressed one another.

And in the sketch, John Cleese clearly displayed his authority over his two colleagues, whilst Ronnie Barker was keen to express his superiority over little Ronnie Corbett, who could only say, "I know my place".

However, it was Ronnie Corbett who put the other two in their place when he said to them, "whilst I'm poor; I'm also honest, industrious and trustworthy, and if I had the inclination, I could look down on them, but I don't". He even had the final say on the subject when his much-maligned character looked up at the other two and said, with a straight face, "I get a pain in the back of my neck".

In our gospel reading this morning the Scribes and the Pharisees are clearly "a pain in the neck" for Jesus, as they try to flex their muscles and exert their so-called authority over him. Jesus was clearly a threat to their power and high stature in the community and they needed to put him in his place. Nonetheless, they hadn't bargained for the quick and clever response of this popular wayside preacher and prophet, not to mention, the promised Son of God.

Putting everything into context, Jesus had just had a rapturous welcome from the locals as he entered through the gates of Jerusalem on a humble donkey. He had been in the temple, overturned the tables of the money changers and lambasted those involved for turning "a house of prayer into a den of robbers".

He had healed the blind and the lame who came to see him, cursed a fig tree for not bearing fruit, which subsequently withered and died, and he had lectured his disciples on the importance of having faith.

And it was back in the temple courts when the chief priests and the elders asked him on whose authority he was acting. Hence, the amazing response from Jesus which left his audience speechless.

By replying with a question of his own making and asking the Jewish leaders "where John's baptism had come from; heaven, or earth", they were dumbfounded, and after deliberating the consequences of their answer they simply replied, "we don't know". This put Jesus firmly in the driving seat and he responded accordingly by telling them that he too would not let on where his own authority had come from.

This then led to Jesus' parable of the two sons. One who says he will do what his father asks, but doesn't, and one who says he won't do as his father asks, but does.

Jesus then compared the chief priests and the elders to the son who said "yes", but didn't do as his father asked, and the tax collectors and the prostitutes to the son who said "no", but then changed his mind and did what was asked of him.

This comparison is because the Jewish leaders had supposedly said “yes” to God all of their lives, but subsequently said “no” to the teachings of Jesus. Whilst, on the other hand, the “unbelieving” tax collectors and prostitutes had always said “no” to God, but after listening carefully to what Jesus had to say, had changed their answer to “yes”.

So, as we reflect on this passage of scripture, which category do you and I come under? Did we, like the first son, initially say “yes” to Christ, but through our wrongful words and actions subsequently turn our back on him. Or, like the second son, did we initially say “no” to Jesus, but then as our relationship with Him progressed, did we change our answer to “yes”?

Very similar to John Cleese in the sketch, the Jewish leaders were full of their own importance and considered themselves a cut above the rest. They were convinced that they were far more important than anyone else and that other people should look up to them. They prayed on the street corners, so they could be seen by all who passed by, and they created man made laws to suit their own needs and wants.

Jesus, however, through his parable, reminded them that in actual fact they were far less important than everyone else, even those who were considered to be the lowest of the low in society.

In contrast, Jesus, the Son of God, the creator of the universe, considered himself a mere servant to everyone he met and came across. Despite his divine kingship, he was humble, meek, considerate, caring, compassionate and loving to all he met.

He owned nothing apart from the clothes he wore, and he even washed and cleansed the feet of his friends. Power, wealth and importance were not on his agenda, as he did all he could to comfort the poor, the sick, the suffering and the dying.

But, without doubt, and although he didn't always own up to the fact, his authority definitely came from his Father in heaven.

But what about us? The world we live in seems to be a world where people strive for power, wealth and importance. Political parties throughout the world constantly put each other down as they seek that one extra vote to tip the scales and put their own party in power. And how often is it that personal ambition often takes precedence over the good of the party, or the Nation that an individual person is supposedly serving?

In commerce and industry, certain employees will tread on everyone and everybody in their quest to reach the very top of their profession. You only have to watch the television series, “The Apprentice” to come to that conclusion.

In society as a whole, we still find that there is a huge divide between rich and poor, and white, black and ethnic minorities, which doesn't seem to improve from one year to the next. Even the Covid19 virus seems to affect the underprivileged and disadvantaged far more than the privileged and the wealthy.

And in our churches too, there can often be conflict between individuals and denominations, as power and authority can often take precedence over what we really are about.

The gospel message for us this morning is that even if we get things wrong at first, the important thing in the end is that eventually we make things right with God. Power, importance and authority in life are not what really matters. What really counts is our relationship with other people and our relationship with God.

And St Paul highlights all of these facts in his letter to the early church in Philippi. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit", he says. "Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others". "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Jesus Christ".

An office manager was complaining in his staff meeting that he wasn't getting the respect that his position of authority deserved. So, the next day, he attached a large sign to his office door which said in bold letters, "Please note, I am the Boss!" Later on, that same day, he returned from lunch to find that someone had put an even larger notice over the top of his original sign, which read in even bolder letters, "Your wife called. She wants her sign back."

In the sketch I mentioned earlier, little, understated Ronnie Corbett said quite clearly, "I know my place and even if I had the inclination to look down on the other two, I don't".

I pray this morning that whatever positions of power and authority we may hold in life, whether at work, in the community, or at church, the humility of God and the gentleness of Jesus Christ will always dictate how we live our lives.

I pray also that we will all listen carefully to the word of God, so that, like the second son in the parable of the two sons who initially said "no" but changed his mind to "yes", we too can be bold enough to change our minds, change our hearts and change our lives into Christ like reflections of the Son of God.

**Amen**

**Song: [Above all powers](#)**

**Intercessions:**

Lord God, you gave your Son, Jesus, all authority in heaven and earth. Today we pray for all those who have authority over different aspects of our lives, that they may use that authority and power wisely and for the good of human kind and all creation.

We pray for those in authority in your Church. May they always remember that Jesus came to serve, not to be served, and closely follow His example of kindness and compassion. We ask for your grace and wisdom in their leadership, that they may always seek to build up your people, breaking down barriers and healing broken lives. May the love of Christ reach out to those living around us as we live under His authority.

Lord, in your mercy, *Hear our prayer*

We pray for the leaders of our nation and of our communities. At this time they face difficult decisions and responsibilities which most of them could never have imagined. Give them wisdom to understand how best to lead us in this time when many people are living in fear of what the future may hold. We pray too for those advising them on the best way to deal with the pandemic.

Lord, in your mercy,

*Hear our prayer*

We pray for world leaders. Many countries face not only Covid-19, but war, famine and power struggles between those who would like to be in authority. So often leaders seem to want power for its own sake, rather than as a means of helping their peoples. May their hearts and minds be transformed by the loving authority of Christ.

Lord, in your mercy,

*Hear our prayer*

In a moment of silence we remember those who are suffering at this time, those who are ill, lonely or grieving, those who face unemployment and don't know how they will feed their families. We think of...

Lord, in your mercy,

*Hear our prayer*

Finally, we pray for ourselves, asking that the gentle but firm authority of Christ may guard our hearts, rule our minds and guide our footsteps.

We ask all these prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen

### [The Lord's Prayer](#)

**Song:** [Forever Jesus](#) – Stuart Townend

#### **Blessing:**

Heavenly Father, as we take our worship, praise and prayer from this place and into our daily lives, may we be sustained through your grace and unconditional love. May we feel the presence of our Saviour walking beside us, and know the power of the Spirit in both our actions and our words. And, finally, may we lift high the name of Jesus, until the earth and the heavens are filled with His glory **Amen**

**Song to close:** [Lift high the name of Jesus](#) – Keith and Kristyn Getty