

Hymn: 160 Praise my soul the king of heaven

<https://youtu.be/i3dHeRB2c3g>

Prayer of Approach and Confession and the Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, Heavenly King,

You are the joy of all the earth, great and small

Rich and poor, powerful and weak,

Everywhere we turn we find you, you are our very life, our flesh and bone, our King of kings and our Lord of Lords.

Help us now, in this time of worship,

To listen and learn and grow

So that we may be more fully able to reflect

Your glory in the day-to-day living of our lives.

God of community

As you lead us through the crowded streets of living,

where we must learn, and change and grow

we thank you for those who surround us,

those whom we call brother and sister in Christ.

Thank you for the jumbled family of faith

that we know as your church

It is the church of forgiven sinners

of those with bruised knees and wounded hearts

who have been soothed and calmed by the ointment of your love.

For this diverse and gathered church we pray

that in the midst of our living you will guide our steps

so that we walk together, refusing to march on ahead

but humbly waiting for those who lag behind.

Listening, lending an arm or a shoulder to lean upon

and willing to become the caring, sharing people

you want your church to be.

Merciful God

We confess to you all in our lives that grieves you:

Forgive us for fearing to trust you,

Forgive us for wounding with words instead of healing with hands

Forgive us for being quick to anger and short of steadfast love.

Forgive us for being slow to care and abounding in indifference.

Forgive us for forgetting to affirm and being too ready to condemn.

Forgive us for treating as duty what should be delight, as burden what should be privilege and as intrusion what should be loving sacrifice.

Forgive us for all the things that we bring before you now in the silence of our hearts

SILENCE

God provides all that we need so that we might be made whole and God is always ready to begin again with us.

God loves us, God forgives us, we bring our thankful praise and join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us saying: 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever Amen.

Bible Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-10 & Mark 6:1-13 (NRSVA)

Hymn: 533 Will you come and follow me

<https://youtu.be/zk6lUaJ3sk>

Reflection

There's an unwritten question and theme running behind our Bible readings today – The theme could be said to be about identity and authority, the question could be –

Who does he think he is? And, I suppose, that this might have been the question that those leaders of the tribes of Israel were saying as they came to acknowledge David as King.

Back on the 6th of June we heard a Bible reading from 1 Sam Ch 8 about the Israelites demanding that Samuel find them a king even although Samuel pointed out some of the negative aspects of having a king, the people insisted that they wanted a king just as other nations had. Saul was the first king, and he ruled over all of the 12 tribes of Israel for 40 years. After Saul's death, the kingdom became temporarily divided, with Saul's son Ishbosheth

ruling 11 of the tribes, called Israel, for two years, while David ruled as king of Judah, based in Hebron, for 7 and a half years. .

After Ishbosheth was assassinated, all 12 of the tribes of Israel meet at Hebron.

It's here at this meeting at Hebron - that we heard about in our reading today - that David needs to gain the support and loyalty of the leaders of all the tribes of Israel. If he is to consolidate his power over all of them, an agreement or covenant has to be made with the tribal elders. With their leader Ishbosheth having been killed the elders come to David reinforcing their blood ties naming him as kin 'your own flesh and blood', acknowledging his authority, and declaring God's intention for David to shepherd the whole of Israel and to become their chosen ruler - the elders acknowledge David as shepherd and king – they recognise his authority.

After this - Hebron, a city seen as the capital of the Southern Kingdom, could no longer be considered a practical place for David to have as his base of operations. Moving to a Northern city like Shiloh or Shechem or Gilgal wouldn't work either. So David turns his eyes to Jerusalem - a city that was centrally located in the newly formed kingdom. It was a city that had never been conquered by any Israelite tribe and so no Israelite could lay claim to it. It was the perfect place for the capital of the united monarchy and became known as Zion the city of God. The very name Zion is theologically loaded as there are echoes of Mount Saphon. Mount Saphon was a mountain in the north of the country. Earlier religions had seen Mount Saphon as the place where the Gods lived. Here mount Zion becomes the place where God lives. It is the place of God's throne, of the temple and from there his kingdom reaches out to the ends of the earth. Zion didn't signify a special place where God was rather it signified the presence of God with David and his people.

So - who does he think he is?

David, a young boy, a shepherd who had no power and no great standing is now king of all Israel, an insignificant shepherd is now acknowledged by all the tribes of Israel as being their king. A

powerless child has grown into a man who has the greatest authority in all the kingdom of Israel.

Who does he think he is?

You can just hear the people of Nazareth saying this can't you, as Jesus returns to his hometown to teach in the synagogue. There's a complete contrast here with the story of David his ancestor whose authority was acknowledged. Jesus has been going from place to place preaching, teaching and healing. He's built up a great reputation and popularity. People elsewhere are acknowledging his power and wondering what this means about his identity yet, here, he returns to his hometown and the home crowd know him well – they know him too well. Rather than looking at the person and work of Jesus and being amazed by the authority of God in him - the home crowd can't see beyond the boy who grew up in their midst. Jesus looks at the crowd and is saddened and amazed at their lack of faith.

Jesus chooses not to do any miracles other than healing the sick. Now we need to be very clear here about what the text is saying – It is not saying that Jesus couldn't heal because the people had no faith. Unlike other readings - faith here is not being cast as a necessity for healing - rather faith is seen as the ability to recognise the authority of God when it presents itself in our midst. We grasp the real meaning of Jesus' miracles when in faith we recognise, acknowledge, and respond to what God is doing through Jesus Christ.

So how do these readings speak to us today in this time and this place?

These readings speak to us of the recognition of identity and authority.

The acknowledgment of allegiance to a King or higher power and so they also speak of calling and response, of relationships and growth, of where we feel at home and of where we have a sense of belonging. They speak to us of where we feel God's presence and of how we see and understand Jesus to be working in our lives and in our church and our community.

Three things stood out for me as I studied these texts for today.

- The first is, of course is, that unlike the folk of his hometown - we recognise the identity, authority and power of Jesus. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords – he is the son of God – the third person of the Trinity equal in power and authority to God and the Holy Spirit. This is what we acknowledge when we say that we believe in him.
- The second – is how we identify ourselves. We are Christians - believers in Christ – as such, we are gathered together as a special community or family to do his work. Jesus calls us to him and to one another. As we consider the implications of the decisions made at the recent General Assembly namely the reduction in Ministries posts and the enlargement - of areas - or numbers of parishes - that Ministers and church leaders will have to cover - how will we identify ourselves going forward? Will we become ensconced in our identity as Cleish/Fossway Church? or will we be open to becoming a new identity, to becoming part of a new network of churches working together where we expand and accept our brothers and sisters in Christ in a larger area doing Christ's work together? Those ancient Israelites acknowledged the authority of David as their King and in so doing had to abandon the stances of enmity and rivalry that they had held for many years.
- The third thing that occurred to me when I considered the theme of authority was the situation we are in, at the moment, regarding the Covid pandemic. The government – our secular authority – issues the guidelines that we are to follow so that we can keep people safe – the Church of Scotland central administration interprets those guidelines and works with us and helps us to make risk assessments and plans to put them into practice and ultimately your Kirk Session is responsible for carrying these plans through. It is a long and complicated process. Changes are coming but it will take time to put the changes into action. Speaking on behalf of your Kirk Session, on this National Thank You

Day, I'd like to thank you for your patience and acceptance and for helping us to put all those plans into action – and for abiding by guidelines and restrictions that sometimes have seemed to be extreme for churches in comparison with what is happening elsewhere. We look forward with hope - to more positive changes coming - and with thankfulness that we have managed to keep our churches places of safety and sanctuary.

One final thought I would leave with you, Jesus, 'was amazed at their unbelief', what great miracles might have happened if they only believed in him and who he was? Where is Christ leading us? Where is the Spirit moving us? Where will our belief – our acknowledgement of Christ's authority in our lives take us? What miracles can he do with us and through us? We just have to believe and acknowledge him as our King of Kings, our Lord and Saviour as the authority in our lives and go where he leads. Thanks be to God Amen.

Hymn: 522 The church is wherever God's people are praising
<https://youtu.be/SgbvASPRtIE>

Benediction

God has spoken,

"I am sending you in love – Imagine the possibilities.

My love is all you need.

Colour the world with it, spread it through your speaking,

honour it with your living,

Go now for God has called you,

Christ has sent you,

and the Spirit has empowered you.

Go and the blessing of almighty God Father, Son and Holy Spirit go with you.

and threefold Amen.