

Sunday 6 August 2023

Civic service

**Service celebrating Cllr Kevin Dawson as
chairman of Saddleworth Parish Council 2023–24**



Uppermill, Saddleworth

This service occurred on Sunday 6 August in the Central Methodist Church in Uppermill, Saddleworth. It celebrated Councillor Andrew Dawson becoming Chairman of the Saddleworth Parish Council, and was attended by a wide array of civic leaders.

Sermon and prayers of intercession © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

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To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,
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Hymn

Now thank We all our God

Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
to keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
of this world in the next.

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son and Spirit blest,
who reign in highest heaven
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

Welcome and introduction

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All **Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

Call to worship

Let our prayer and praise rise to you, O Lord.

Since you receive our praise and have compassion on our weakness, grant that this time of worship may give joy, peace, and quietness; and without stain of sin, so that, being delivered from temptation, we may glorify you as our eternal King.

All Most merciful God,
we confess to you,
before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins,
heal us by your Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ.
Amen.

O God, make speed to save us.

All O Lord, make haste to help us.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever.
Amen.

The Collects

The Collect for The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

The Collect for The Transfiguration

Father in heaven,
whose Son Jesus Christ was wonderfully transfigured
before chosen witnesses upon the holy mountain,
and spoke of the exodus he would accomplish at Jerusalem:
give us strength so to hear his voice and bear our cross
that in the world to come we may see him as he is;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

Reading from the Old Testament

There is a time for everything;
And a season for every activity under the Heavens;
A time to be born and a time to die;
A time the plant and a time to uproot;
A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build;
A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance;
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them;
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to search and a time to give up;
A time to keep and a time to throw away;
A time to tear and a time to mend;
A time to be silent and a time to speak;
A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

HYMN

Guide me, O my great Redeemer

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty;
hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
where the healing waters flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
ever be my strength and shield,
ever be my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever sing to you,
I will ever sing to you.

Reading from the New Testament

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the

light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me".') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. *John 1:1-17*

Sermon

In some respects, today—6 August—is a strange day. On 6 August, the Church remembers the Transfiguration when Jesus climbed a high mountain in ancient Palestine, and his three disciples who accompanied him saw him transformed before their very eyes: he glowed intensely with supernatural, uncreated light. He remained a human being through and through but was suddenly showing his utter divinity at the same time as his humanity. Today we remember that transformation. But today we also remember the first time in world history that an atomic bomb was used in anger, on 6 August 1945, at Hiroshima in Japan. So on this one day in the year, we recall two events, with opposing messages: in the one a human is revealed to be fully divine and in the other we see humans unleashing a horror beyond horror. That coinciding of dates is an accident of the calendar that many people of faith ponder and talk about.

A second accident, maybe, is the way that someone, somewhere has chosen our two readings for today. First, in Ecclesiastes, we hear there is a time for every choice. The text reads as a list choices, each between opposites, though in our everyday world they may sometimes seem a bit more complicated than that. And,

in the Gospel according to St John, we read that in an instant of time some two thousand odd years ago, God chose to take on human flesh and became the human being that history remembers today as Jesus. That's what the phrase, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' is actually saying.

As we splice all these themes together, we note how every instant in time offers us a choice. In fact, every second of every day offers us the opportunity to make *the* choice: we can choose good or we can choose evil. In effect, we choose to *do* good or choose to *do* evil, we choose to *be* good or choose to *be* evil. With practice, we can choose to do the right thing or choose to do something else. As a Christian, I would go further and to say that (knowingly or not) we can use every instant as a choice to obey the love of God or not to obey it. We can choose to show that love and be that love and take that love into places that are un-loved and feel un-lovely. After all, the Bible says that God is love, so God becoming a human means he became a human dispensing love, but that's an address for another day.

Each of us lives a different life—that's so obvious it's trivial—so the details of those choices, good or evil, and the outworking of those choices, will differ for each one of us here today. But, nevertheless, the elemental choice between good and evil remains the same. I can do what God wants and commands ... or not, so help me God. And so can you.

It's time to get real. All of us generally face a great many choices, and they will rank from definitely wrong through possibly neutral through to definitely good. Some are insignificant while others are simply brutal in their magnitude. But there is often one more choice: we can choose good or evil, but we can also choose 'best'. And that 'best' will always be costly and, when standing in this building, I am duty bound to describe it with the words, 'It always carries the possibility of becoming Christ-like'. It does so whether we know it or not.

Like the many choices listed in Ecclesiastes, every choice we ever make has a consequence. If we consistently choose to do that which is not just good but the best, if we always try to do that which God would have us do, then a transformation, a *Transfiguration*, occurs in us, and something akin to divinity will start to shine through our lives. St Paul described that process as being 'changed from glory into glory'—a phrase famously taken up by Charles Wesley in his well-loved hymn 'Love divine'. Stated otherwise and to misquote St John ever so slightly, 'The Word becomes flesh in our own lives and makes us his dwelling place' ... as he did in Jesus' life (although clearly to a lesser extent in us than in him). Conversely, if we do not choose in those ways then he will not be living in us. We make ourselves

unavailable. Or maybe we're being transformed into something, someone less than we could and should be.

As well as instant consequences, we must remember that these habitual choices accumulate and have longer-term consequences too. We start by shaping our choices and very soon they shape us. To use a metaphor, a chance trespass across a field might leave evidence of a path; frequent journeys create a visible shortcut; habitual crossings create a highway that is tempting to others. And so it is when we decide what is good and what is not.

As a wise man once said, 'We all become like the God we adore'. And by 'God' here I include all of us because whatever our faith (or lack of it), that which we think about the most, give most value to, dedicate our lives toward *will* become an object of worship—the word means 'giving worth' it's 'worth-ship'. We could worship ('give worth') to a divine being; but, alternatively, we can decide that the centre of our lives should be money or reputation, or maybe our work, and choose for them because we think they are good; and it could be us, ourselves: the self-made person worshipping their creator. Some of these are good—often very good— but we must always choose the best. Today's Bible texts therefore advise each of us here to think hard and decide what our God is because it's that which we will listen to and think is saying to us, 'I'm right: listen to me!' If that God is worth following, then we must consciously choose to do it and do so again and again and again.

All of us here have lives that impact on Oldham and Saddleworth (maybe multiple parts and in multiple settings). In every interaction, all of us are being invited to decide 'is this good or is this evil?' and thence the progression, 'What is good, what is better, what is best?' We don't have to decide in a vacuum. If we always choose God the Almighty (the real God) and never choose against him, then we will become more like God, and the world will become a better place. He will live in us and help us make those decisions. He will empower and inspire those decisions.

For those of us here today, that deciding could start in Saddleworth, then the ripples of goodness and Godliness will then transform Greater Manchester, England, Europe, ... , a ripple of consciously-chosen good. And it starts with us. It starts when we allow the word to become flesh in our own lives, by simply, consciously, deliberately, choose to do good.

Prayers of intercession

These prayers are inspired by the version of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's Gospel. Let us pray.

Our Father. Help us know you and choose to do your work whenever and wherever we can. We ask for strength, wisdom, and determination.

Leader Lord, your Kingdom come.

All Lord, your will be done.

Your Kingdom come, on earth as it is in Heaven. Inspire us to make the world a better place ... wherever we are and whatever we are doing. To that end, help us love our neighbour as ourselves.

Leader Lord, your Kingdom come.

All Lord, your will be done.

Give us today our daily bread. Direct our ambition; teach us to strive for that which matters. We also pray for those in our communities who have no bread: direct our work to alleviate need and inequality.

Leader Lord, your Kingdom come.

All Lord, your will be done.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Give us the courage to forgive others; the grace to forgive ourselves; and the strength to heal the effects of our past actions. Give us the comfort of knowing ourselves forgiven, our hearts strangely warmed as we choose you and your work.

Leader Lord, your Kingdom come.

All Lord, your will be done.

Do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one. Help us grow in the paths of discipleship, particularly those aspects we find difficult. Help us as we work against unjust structures and to use our choices to further the common good.

Leader Lord, your Kingdom come.

All Lord, your will be done.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Help and direct all those who choose for your Kingdom and thwart the work of those who work against it.

Leader Lord, your Kingdom come.

All Lord, your will be done.

Finally, we pray for the work of this Parish Council, its members and especially Kevin its leader. Inspire all of them in all their work.

Leader Lord, your Kingdom come.

All Lord, your will be done.

We gather together all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, using the words that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

**All 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,
forever and ever.
Amen.**

Hymn

All things Bright and Beautiful

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small;
All things wise and wonderful The Good Lord made them all.

Each little flower that opens Each little bird that sings;
He made their glowing colours, and made their tiny wings.

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small;
All things wise and wonderful The Good Lord made them all.

The purple headed mountains, the rivers running by;
The sunset and the morning that brightens up the sky.

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small;
All things wise and wonderful The Good Lord made them all.

The cold wind in the winter, the pleasant summer sun;
The ripe fruits in the garden He made them every-one.

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small;
All things wise and wonderful The Good Lord made them all.

He gave us eyes to see them and lips that we might tell;
How great is the Almighty who has made all things well.

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small;
All things wise and wonderful The Good Lord made them all.

The blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and evermore.

All Amen

Hymn

Jerusalem

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountain green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?
And did the countenance divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem buildèd here
Among those dark satanic mills?
Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!
I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.