



# The Methodist Church In Ireland

## Sunday 23rd August, “Who do you say that I am?”

This short act of worship has been prepared so that you can spend some moments with God, knowing that other people in your local congregation and beyond are sharing in this same act of worship with you.

### Opening Prayer

Heavenly father, our provider, our maker, and our protector. Through your goodness, we are alive and healthy enough to gather and worship you. We praise you for all that you have given us and thank you in Jesus’ name. Holy Lord, we commit this time to you thankful that you are with us. Amen

### Hymn: Great is the Lord

*Sing/read/proclaim the words of this wonderful song*

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise,  
The city of our God, the holy place,  
The joy of the whole earth.  
Great is the Lord in whom we have the victory,  
He aids us against the enemy,  
We bow down on our knees.

And Lord we want to lift Your Name on high,  
And Lord we want to thank you  
For the works You've done in our lives;  
And Lord we trust in Your unfailing love  
For you alone are God eternal,  
Throughout Earth and heaven above

*Steve McEwan*

### Exodus 1: 8 – 2: 10

<sup>8</sup>Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. <sup>9</sup>“Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. <sup>10</sup>Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks

out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

<sup>11</sup>So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. <sup>12</sup>But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites <sup>13</sup>and worked them ruthlessly. <sup>14</sup>They made their lives bitter with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labour the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

<sup>15</sup>The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, <sup>16</sup>“When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” <sup>17</sup>The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. <sup>18</sup>Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

<sup>19</sup>The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

<sup>20</sup>So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. <sup>21</sup>And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

<sup>22</sup>Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman,<sup>2</sup> and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.<sup>3</sup> But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket<sup>[a]</sup> for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.<sup>4</sup> His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

<sup>5</sup>Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it.<sup>6</sup> She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

<sup>7</sup>Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

<sup>8</sup>"Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother.<sup>9</sup> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him.<sup>10</sup> When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses,<sup>[b]</sup> saying, "I drew him out of the water."

### Let us pray

Eternal God, in whom we live and move and have our being, whose face is hidden from us by our sins, and whose mercy we forget in the blindness of our hearts: cleanse us from all our offenses, and deliver us from proud thoughts and vain desires, that with reverent and humble hearts we may draw near to you, confessing our faults, confiding in your grace, and finding in you our refuge and strength; through Jesus Christ your Son. Amen

### Romans 12: 1-8

#### A Living Sacrifice

**12** Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of

your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

#### Humble Service in the Body of Christ

<sup>3</sup>For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.<sup>4</sup> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,<sup>5</sup> so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.<sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your<sup>[a]</sup> faith; <sup>7</sup> if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,<sup>[b]</sup> do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

### Matthew 16: 13-20

#### Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

<sup>13</sup>When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

<sup>14</sup>They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

<sup>15</sup>"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

<sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

<sup>17</sup>Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.<sup>18</sup> And I tell you that you are Peter,<sup>[a]</sup> and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades<sup>[b]</sup> will not overcome it.<sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be<sup>[c]</sup> bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be<sup>[d]</sup> loosed in heaven."<sup>20</sup> Then he

ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

## Reflection

The big question posed to Jesus' audience, his disciples, is a powerful query upon us as well today. Who do we say Jesus is? And the question is even more resonant if we embrace the fullness of what it means to speak it or say it in our own contexts. It just may be that the lives we lead in light of our hopes in the Messiah are just as critical as what we confess with words, no matter how true or elegant. So, as we answer this question, the shape of our lives may be as important as the words our lips voice.

Questions of identity are evident in the Gospels. In both narrative accounts and explicit identifications, the Gospels weave a number of portraits of Jesus. In doing so, however, the Gospel writers are not just interested in correctly defining who Jesus is but also in shaping a community moulded in light of his actions and teachings. So, these questions of identity are not just a matter of definition but of formation, not just doctrine but discipleship.

The question of Jesus' identity is stated as sharply as any other account of Jesus' ministry. Gathered in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus wonders aloud what the crowds are saying about him but more importantly what the disciples think. It's another way of saying, "Why are you following me? Why have you left everything you know? Who do you say that I am?" And so it might be worthwhile to ask the faithful today a similar question. Why are you here? Why have you chosen to follow this Galilean peasant? Why are you on this path?

This narrative of discovery is particularly crucial in Mark's account (8:27-38). In Mark, this scene is the critical narrative hinge upon which the whole story turns. With Peter's confession, the story makes a dramatic shift towards the cross. In Matthew's account, the story remains important though perhaps not as central as Mark's version. It remains critical because the question of Jesus' identity drives so much of the story. For instance, questions of identity are precisely why Matthew begins with a complex, fascinating, structured genealogy.

Genealogies are not just simple accounts of past ancestors. They are ways that we construct identity, ways in which we relate to our past.

Jesus' identity is inextricably linked by Matthew's genealogy with Abraham and David, with exile and deliverance, with kings and extraordinarily faithful women. So also, the birth narrative places Jesus in distinguished company. The threats over his young life, his family's exile into Egypt, and their eventual return resonates with Moses' own story. In short, for Matthew, identity is not just about who you are but who is around you, who is accompanying you, who has come before you.

When Jesus polls his disciples about public opinion, they recount that many think he is John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or another prophet risen anew. The crowds have gotten an important part of Jesus' identity exactly right. His ministry is not a diversion in the narratives of God's interactions with God's people. In many ways, Jesus is not a detour on God's plans. Instead, Jesus belongs in a long line of faithful servants of God, prophets willing to stake their lives for the sake of God's people.

The power of Peter's confession is only enhanced as the passage ends. Here, Jesus grants Peter a new name, "The Rock," which is also a symbolic anchor for the "church." There are, of course, generations of debates revolving around the identification of "the rock" upon which Jesus will build the church. What may be even more telling is the power that comes in the wake of confessing Jesus as Messiah and living into this world-changing reality. A synchronicity emerges between what happens here on earth and what happens in the heavens. There is power in faith, a power that resonates into the highest heavens.

The question for us is how we might see that power working in our midst. Do we look to the spectacular and the stunning to see God's power at work? But what if God's power is more subtle than such fireworks? What if the simple assertion that Jesus is the Messiah is more powerful but quieter than the clanging gongs?

It is interesting that this word “church” is present here at all. After all, while the term occurs regularly in the rest of the New Testament, Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 are the only occurrences we found in the Gospels.

Where do we see God’s power emerging in our churches, even in small, quiet, seemingly insignificant ways? How are churches as a community binding the forces of death that seek to engulf us? In every thoughtful gesture, in every supportive word, in every denunciation of injustice, in every meal cooked, in every day of work, we might just catch a glimpse of the power Jesus promised here.

In the end, a life of faithful service may be the best answer to that awe-inspiring question: Who do you say that I am?

### **Respond/Reflect**

Take some time to reflect and respond. Think about how you would respond personally to this question from Jesus? Then think about how your life, your words and actions reflect that answer.

### **A time of Prayer**

Let’s pray

Lord, we thank you for your promises and for your love and mercy that you show to us each and every day.

Lord, there are many people scared and vulnerable. May they feel your calming presence and get the support they need.

I especially want to pray for.....

Lord, help those who have been bereaved when recently or not, may they be comforted and supported.

I especially want to pray for.....

We pray for those who are sick, whether at home or in hospital, may they feel better soon and be patient during that recovery time.

I especially want to pray for.....

We pray for those working in any caring role. May they feel encouraged and strengthen in all that they do.

I especially want to pray for.....

Lord, help us all to be a light in someone’s darkness by showing your love to them through our words and actions. May we always reflect who we say you are. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father.....

### **Hymn: One is the Body**

*Sing/read/proclaim the words of this wonderful hymn*

One is the body and one is the Head, one is the Spirit by whom we are led; one God and Father, one faith and one call for all.

Christ who ascended to heaven above is the same Jesus whose nature is love, who once descended to bring to this earth new birth.

Gifts have been given well suited to each; some to be prophets, to pastor or preach, some, through the Gospel, to challenge, convert and teach.

Called to his service are women and men so that his body might ever again witness through worship, through deed and through word to Christ our Lord.

### **A prayer of Blessing**

Jesus you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

You are my Lord and my Saviour. May my life reflect who I know you are to me. **Amen.**

**New International Version - UK (NIVUK)**

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