

# *Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet*

*19 September 2021*

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*Welcome*

*Song: O for a thousand tongues*

1 O for a thousand tongues to sing  
my great Redeemer's praise,  
the glories of my God and King,  
the triumphs of his grace!

2 My gracious Master and my God,  
assist me to proclaim,  
to spread thro' all the earth abroad  
the honors of your name.

3 Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
that bids our sorrows cease,  
'tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'tis life and health and peace.

4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
he sets the prisoner free;  
his blood can make the foulest clean;  
his blood availed for me.

5 To God all glory, praise, and love  
be now and ever given  
by saints below and saints above,  
the Church in earth and heaven

*Prayer*

*Song: In the name of God the father*

In the name of God the Father,  
for the glory of the Son,  
in the power of the Spirit,  
now in faith we come.  
We are gathered in your presence  
as the people of the King

and you raise our hearts to heaven as we sing.

*We lift up your name, O God,  
you are worthy of our praise,  
so great in power  
and glorious in grace,  
so high and holy  
the mighty three-in-one:  
in your name we come.*

We will call upon your mercy  
as we celebrate your grace,  
and we'll bring our joys and troubles  
as we seek your face.

We will share the peace you've given  
as we feast upon your word;  
and you make us into light  
for all the world.

Open our lips, open our lips,  
and we shall declare your praises.  
Open our eyes, open our eyes to you.  
Open our hearts, open our minds,  
we're trusting you to change us,  
open our lives, let Jesus shine anew.

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*Prayer*

Lord's prayer active

**Our Father in heaven,  
arms up  
hallowed be your name,  
banner shape  
your kingdom come,  
hands together out to  
side**

your will be done, side,  
palms side out  
on earth as in heaven.

Palms down & up

Give us today our daily  
bread. Hand together  
cupped

Forgive us our sins brush  
right hand

as we forgive those who  
sin against us. brush left  
hand

Lead us not into  
temptation fist to chest  
across

but deliver us from evil.

Other fist to chest across

For the kingdom, arms  
wide, palms side

the power, fists lifted

and the glory are yours  
rain fingers

now and for ever. Right  
hand pointing, left hand  
spiral finger out

Amen. Hands clap above  
head

<sup>13</sup> Are there any of you who are wise and understanding? You are to prove it by your good life, by your good deeds performed with humility and wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. <sup>15</sup> Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. <sup>16</sup> Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.

### **Friendship with the World**

<sup>4</sup> Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires for pleasure, which are constantly fighting within you. <sup>2</sup> You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it. <sup>3</sup> And when you ask, you do not receive it, because your motives are bad; you ask for things to use for your own pleasures. <sup>4</sup> Unfaithful people! Don't you know that to be the world's friend means to be God's enemy? If you want to be the world's friend, you make yourself God's enemy. <sup>5</sup> Don't think that there is no truth in the scripture that says, "The spirit that God placed in us is filled with fierce desires." <sup>6</sup> But the grace that God gives is even stronger. As the scripture says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

<sup>7</sup> So then, submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil, and he will run away from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God, and he will come near to you.

## *Prayer*

### *Sermon: Wisdom of heaven*

I'm doing a doctorate in practical theology at Chester. It's a qualitative research project where I have studied four different churches and interviewed 3 members from each church about discernment and the Church Meeting. And just this week I've been thinking about practical wisdom, so our scripture today has been suitable indeed.

I'd like to tell you about one of the women that took part in my research project: Fiona. None of the names I use are real names today. Fiona was a kind middle aged white woman who had just retired from the civil service. I met her at home which was as she said 'in a bit of a muddle' because she had builders in fitting a new kitchen. In the interview she told me a story of the history of her church and in particular the church meeting. She had heard from others it was known to be wretched. One woman told her 'I'm never going to that wretched meeting again.' She told me that there had been conflict in the past where staff had been treated badly in the church meeting and now the meeting was poorly attended. Nell attended a different Baptist church to Fiona. She began to tell me of an intensely testing period in her church's life connected to a previous minister. It was so difficult for the church financially, spiritually, and even legally that although she told me what had happened, she asked that it not be mentioned in detail in the project and only referred to as 'our financial and personnel challenge'. Her church never truly recovered from it. I'm sad to say that in my research I have found churches full of bitterness, anger, quarrelling, jealous and selfish behaviour.

As you might imagine, in such churches it is difficult to find wisdom and to discern the mind of Christ. Quite a few of the churches in the project were bound up in conflict, trouble and anger at how decisions were

made or who had real power at the meeting. Wherever there is quarrelling and fighting there is no wisdom from God says James.

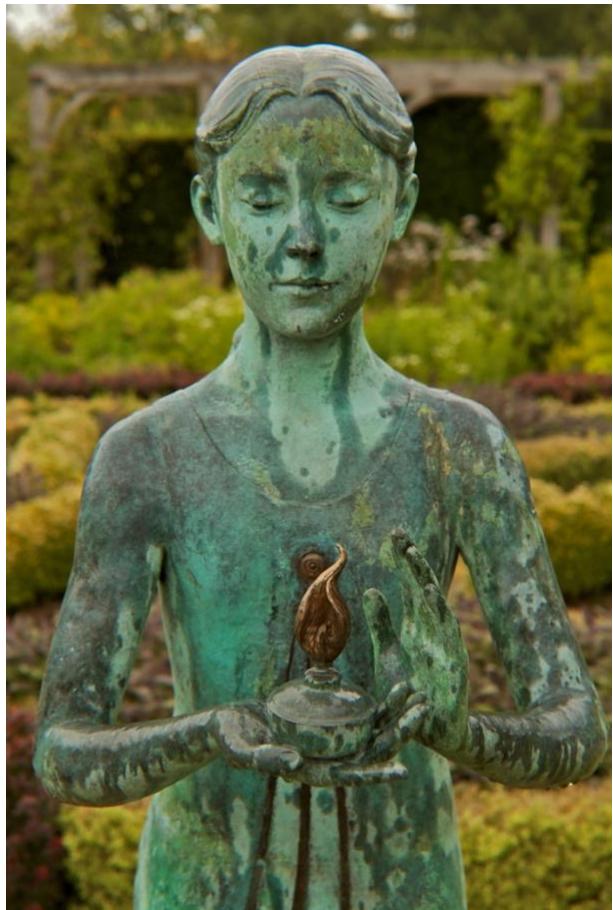
There are some families like this too and individuals looking for direction in life can wind up being angry and boastful consumed by the world's wisdom. The world's wisdom tells us that success equals power, riches, and influence. And sometimes that means that as individuals, families and as a church we seek success above all else. We are drawn to what looks good, wherever we look powerful and direct our lives to achieving it. The world's wisdom says- you can have whatever you want. I was once at a prayer meeting and prayer was said: Lord, please let West Ham football club win their next game. This was an individual asking God for success against all odds. We might not ask for our football team to win, but do we ask for God's leading, God's wisdom or do we ask for what the world wants? Have we ever confused the world's wisdom and the wisdom of heaven?

In this letter to the early church, James is challenging selfish and unhelpful behaviour seen in and around the church. James is particular in the words he chooses to describe the behaviour that he is addressing in the church. When he talks about bitter jealousy, he used the unusual word *eritheia*. It's not the normal word for jealous. The only clue for understanding more about that word is from a play that Aristotle wrote where he uses *eritheia* to describe the self-seeking pursuit of political power by unfair means. Have you ever known a political to be self-serving? To be hypocritical? And by the same token, have any of us used our power, relationships, or money to get what we want?

But scripture says something different about wisdom. The wisdom of heaven is one marked by peace and goodness.

Take a look would you at this picture. It's a sculpture called 'the lamp of wisdom' at

Waterperry gardens near Oxford. What do you think it tells us about wisdom?



Girl - see Proverbs 3.14-18 for image of wisdom as female

Young – Matthew 18.3 like a child seeking the Kingdom of God

Eyes shut – Symbolic of praying and submission to wisdom

Peaceful face – not restless looking for answers

Holding a lamp – wisdom is light

Open hands – open to leading from the light, symbol of sharing wisdom

Brass button – same colour as flame, so wisdom is in our hearts and in the flame.

James 3.17 says wisdom is pure, peaceful, gentle, friendly, compassionate and full of good deeds. So then this is the litmus test for if we have received wisdom – is it pure? Is it peaceful? Is it gentle? Is anything good coming from it? For the harvest of wisdom comes from seeds planted by peacemakers in peace.

Across all the churches that I studied, a few key phrases emerged as to know when you've discerned the mind of Christ, so when a church has found God's wisdom. Barbara was an entirely glamorous older white woman with a beautiful gold charm bracelet and tinted and set hair. She described a sense of comfort when discerning the mind of Christ. She said 'it all just fell into place' and 'it felt right'. Barbara is describing what wisdom feels like, which theologians call embodied wisdom. Dorothy Bass says Christian practical wisdom is seen in communities where: 'it shows up in a kind of good judgment they are able to put into play in a particular time and place, sometimes as if by second nature (2016, 1).' At Poynton Baptist, there was a previous minister who used to say – you know it in your knower. Wisdom is felt in the gut, in our soul or as in the sculpture in our hearts and hands. This wisdom is wisdom that is peaceful, gentle, brings light and is compassionate. This is the wisdom we must seek. This is the wisdom we must practice. This is the wisdom of God.

The final test of God's wisdom is its effect. Does the wisdom we use in our daily lives as individuals, with family and friends, at church – does it grow good things? Is our wisdom active? Does it lead us into a new season? Do the seeds of our wisdom grow peace? Last week we thought about our words and what we use our tongues for. If we feel it is wise to swear and curse at someone who has done harm to us, what wisdom are we sowing? Is our anger honouring to God? Does it lead others to peace? Does it grow good things?

Jesus showed in a perfect life the wisdom of heaven. The wisdom of heaven that upholds the meek, the humble, the peacemaker and calls them blessed. The wisdom of heaven that sent Jesus from heaven to earth in an act of humility and love. The wisdom of heaven that sees Jesus die on a cross in humility and grace to make peace in the world. 1 Corinthians 1.27 says God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

May we seek the wisdom of heaven. May we know the peace and purity of God's wisdom in our lives, words and actions. May we follow Christ humble servant King full of wisdom and grace.

### *Communion*

#### *Song: Jesus you call us*

Jesus, you call us to this, your table,  
meeting our hunger  
with living bread;  
now, as we share in your broken body,  
so our hearts are fed.

*This is our communion,  
gathered here in union with you,  
we are one.*

*Yours will be the song we sing,  
evermore remembering your cross,  
and all you've done,  
until you come.*

Jesus, you draw us to taste your mercy,  
meeting our thirst  
with your cup of wine;  
now, by your blood, you declare us holy,  
filled with life, divine.

Jesus, you send us to love and serve you,  
meeting the world  
with your truth and grace;  
now, by your Spirit, you lead us onward,  
to your glorious praise.

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### *Intercession*

#### *Song: Be thou my vision*

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart  
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night  
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord  
Thou my great Father, and I thy true son  
Thou in me dwelling and I with thee one

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise  
Thou mine inheritance, now and always  
Thou and thou only first in my heart  
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art

High King of heaven, my victory won  
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall  
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

Heart of my own heart, whatever befall  
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

### *Blessing*

**May we seek the wisdom of heaven  
May we be peacemakers who plant in peace.**

**May we see the harvest of goodness from the wisdom of God.**

**Amen**