Sunday 4 August 2024

8:45 AM Service

# **Service Overview**

**Speaker:** Stephen Bates

**Sermon Series:** Learning to Walk

**Message:** Learning to Walk in the Truth

**Scripture Reference:** 1 John 1:5 – 1 John 2:2

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# Service Welcome Speaker: Reuben

Good morning PBC. Hello. So, who's tired this morning? When Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman, he said that everyone who drinks that water from the well will be thirsty again. *“But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”* I'm going to read that again. Indeed, the water that Jesus gives to us will become in us a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Does that sound good? Sounds really good to me. Let’s stand and sing.

# Worship Singing

**Song:** Rise by Kirby Kaple, Pat Barret, Nate Moore

**Song:** Jesus Strong & Kind by Colin Buchanan, Jonny Robinson, Michael Farren, Rich Thompson

**Song:** A Thousand Hallelujahs by Brooke Ligertwood, Scott Ligertwood & Phil Wickham

# Post-Worship Prayer Speaker: Kathy Bates

Holy, powerful, merciful, righteous one, we come to you today. We lift up your name because you are worthy of all praise. And we want to thank you that your invitation to us is to come to you. We thank you that we worship you in your splendour, your might and your majesty.

And yet, this is also a place of intimacy where you invite us into your presence. Jesus, we want to thank you for making the way for us to be able to come into the presence of our Most High God. We bless you. We count it as a privilege to be here today and to be worshiping you together. Amen.

# Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events Speaker: Kathy Bates

Hey, take a seat, everyone. I want to say a really big welcome to everyone who's here and everyone who's joining us online as well. So good to have everyone here. I'm Kathy, by the way. I'm one of the pastors here. If you're new or visiting, we're going to send our kids out in the moment, but as they go out, what I'd love the adults in the room to do is to find someone that you don't know the answer ‘how long have you been at PBC?’

*--- Break as the kids leave to attend kids’ church and congregation greets one another ---*

It's so good to continue to meet one another, isn't it? And to continue to meet those that we don't yet know, because God is forming us together as community, as family.

This beautiful invitation that Reuben highlighted this morning, of Jesus’ invitation for us to come to him. I was just thinking, there are a number of ways that we get to come to God, but together in the context of community. And so I just want to highlight some of the very imminent opportunities for us to be doing that together.

So next Saturday, this is a final boarding call for women who are coming to our women's retreats. I think we have over 120 signed up at this point, but if you are yet to sign up, today really is the final day to do that. So either do that via hard copy in the foyer or jump online and do that through the newsletter or website. But really today is the cutoff day if you are coming. We just really want to encourage you to come on time as well. We’ll be starting at 12 PM, and we have a really beautiful afternoon planned. But we plan to use every minute of our afternoon. So let’s not arrive too late.

There’s another opportunity for us to be coming together in Jesus, too, by doing it together next Wednesday week by coming to worship night. It's not a sit in rows kind of event. It's really a very spacious place for worship. You can sit down if you want to, but it’s a spacious time for us to worship together. My honest testimony is I often come to Wednesdays very tired. Wednesdays are my final day in the week, and I feel like I fall over the line often by Wednesday night. So it's a bit of a like, you know, ‘Do I really want to go out on a Wednesday night to a worship night? I’ve just had worship three times on Sunday.’ I just want to say, like, in all honesty, every single time I do that and drag myself out the door, I always go home more re-energized by having been in God's presence and doing that together as a community. So I just want to just encourage us in that space, that being in the presence of God, as Reuben has reminded us this morning, there's a re-energizing and a life that comes from being in that place of worship.

And then, we have another opportunity for us to come to God, by doing it together in the ‘Life in the Spirit’ course that is coming up. So we're going to start be starting this on the 28th of August. There’ll be an initial 5 weeks, then a break for school holidays, and then a further 5 weeks. We've been talking about that in the last couple of weeks, so I'm not going to go into depth there. But I do want to remind all who would like to explore more of who the Holy Spirit is and experience more of him as you walk with Jesus. We get to do this in the context of community, so I encourage you to sign up to that.

And sometimes we get to celebrate in the context of community too, and I love that as well. So next Sunday we have another at least one more baptism. I'm not actually sure how many, and we had a bunch last Sunday. There's another, at least one. And I love that. Cheryl\* was singing this morning because it's her son who's getting baptised next Sunday night. And I encourage you to come along and hear his testimony because it's such an encouraging story of him coming to faith this year. It's beautiful, beautiful, beautiful testimony.

But I do want to open baptism up to any who would like to. If you've never publicly witnessed your faith in Jesus through baptism, you are more than welcome to obey Jesus in that way. We will have the baptistry filled next Sunday, so if you would like to do that either next Sunday or coming up into the future, do come and let one of the pastoral team members know.

# Prayer Speaker: Kathy Bates

And just finally, because we are a community, who do care deeply for one another, I just want to encourage us to be praying for William\* and Lucy\* who lost their son in a car accident this week. Can yyou remember them in your prayers? Can we pray together?

Lord God, I just want to thank you for what it is to be family together. Lord, I want to thank you that church isn't a man-made institution, but Jesus, this was your idea that we be the body of Christ, that we be family, that we be brothers and sisters together. And God, we want to thank you for this place where we get to follow you, Jesus, but in the context with one another.

And Lord, in this space, we do want to pray for William, Lucy and for their family. Lord, we pray for their very raw and hurting hearts. Would you comfort them? Would you hold them and sustain them and give them all that they need day by day as they grieve?

And Lord God, we want to pray for others in our church family too, who aren't with us today because they are doing it tough. Or perhaps even those in the room here who, or who are watching online, who just are really stretched or stressed at the moment. Lord, those who feel overstretched with family needs or work commitments or other things that are going well. God, we just want to pray your capacity for them. I want to pray Jesus that they would continue to centre themselves, to refocus their eyes on you day by day by day. Lord, that you, in your invitation to come to you in our weariness, Lord God, that that would be a very real place that we each go to, that we come, that we receive from you.

And Lord God, I want to thank you that even as broken vessels, we carry a message of hope into our world. And so, Lord God, I want to pray to that even in the midst of whatever might be going on in our lives, Lord, that you would continue to give us opportunities to share with those around us who don't yet know you the hope that we have because of you.

Lord, for those who might be feeling emotionally depleted, I pray that you'd fill us afresh with your presence. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Fill us with your love. And Lord, expand our heart for the people around us, for those who know you and those who don't. Holy spirit, lead us to be your hands, the hands and feet of Jesus, the heart of Jesus to those who are around us, prompt us with a timeliness in prayer. Lead us into specific action. Holy spirit, give us boldness to share how good it is to have a relationship with Jesus and Lord, would you give us courage where appropriate, to invite people of peace to explore who you are in the Bible?

And Lord, today we also want to pray just again for our friends who gather in Prince Alfred Park for lunch. Lord, for those who are on the margins, those who sleep rough. Lord, on these very cold nights, we're just very mindful of what it means to be so vulnerable. So we want to lift them to you. Jesus, I want to pray because in the upside-down world of your kingdom, Lord, your heart is very inclined for those who are on the streets. And so, God, I want to pray that Jesus would be made known to them, Lord God, in whatever way makes sense. But I want to pray, Lord, that as our friends gather to serve lunch in the park, Jesus, that their witness, their presence and also their words and their prayers, Lord, would speak deeply into the lives of those who are there.

We want to pray, Lord, that there would be those who would seek to follow you, Jesus, as their Savior, as their hope, as the healer. And Lord God, for Steve as he comes to speak. I just want to pray. Would you position our hearts to hear the things that you have for us? We want to thank you for your word, and we pray for him, Lord God, that you would anoint Steve as he speaks your word to us. Amen.

# Bible Reading: 1 John 1:5 – 1 John 2:2 (NIV UK)

*1 John 1: 5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all[a] sin.*

*8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.*

*1 John 2: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

# Sermon: Learning to Walk in the Truth Speaker: Stephen Bates

Morning, everyone, and good morning or good afternoon to whenever it is when people switch on and watch this as well. At the moment we're going through a series in 1 John, and I’ll just give a really quick recap of last week where we began the series, where John starts his first letter. He’s wanting us to understand that what we believe about Jesus really matters. How we see him, what we think of what he did, who he is, it really matters.

And there were two convictions that I spoke about last week. The first is that Jesus is not just a man, but neither is he some ghostly spirit. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. That was a really important point of discussion in the early church, when John writes this letter and he wants us to know that Jesus being fully human and fully divine is absolutely essential in our understanding of who Jesus is.

And the second conviction John had was around what Jesus has done for us. Because Jesus is both God and fully human, his death has reconciled us, who are also fully human, to God. And so our identity has changed. Our identity is those who have fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ. And as a consequence of that, we have fellowship with each other.

We are now part of God's family, so we belong to God. As we move into the next section of this letter, there's a lovely little rhythm or structure that John uses. And so, this is a little bit of a sermon by numbers. I'm going to talk about the third conviction, and then I'm going to talk about the three false claims that John addresses, and then the three promises that he makes in response to the three false claims. And then I'm going to suggest, of course, three responses, because we're a Baptist church and it always has three points somewhere along the way (haha).

The third conviction that John says is this, *‘We have heard from him and declare to you, God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.’* So this is his conviction. God is light. It's just a declaration in the same way that God is love. So as love is part of the essential nature of who God is, light is as well. But that makes less sense for us. What do you mean? Light is some part of the essential aspect of who God is. Well, throughout Scripture, this description of ‘God is light’, it happens quite regularly. And when it's used, it conveys two aspects of God's essential being. So God is light equates to two things. Firstly, God is absolute truth and God is absolute perfection. I'll go through both of those.

This first essential aspect of God, when we describe God as light, is that he is truth. God does not lie. He is not mistaken. And most of the guys in the room would say, ‘Well, that's me as well, right?’ Men never make mistakes or we never admit to it. That's not true. But God does not make mistakes and he does not deceive. God is transcendent in the fact that he is above us and beyond us, and yet, at the same time, he reveals himself to us in the same way that light reveals God, so reveals himself. He reveals himself through his Word, the Bible, inspired by his Holy Spirit.

But most stunningly, he reveals himself through the person of Jesus Christ in John's Gospel. When he describes Jesus, he describes Jesus as ‘the light of the world,’ in the sense that in Jesus Christ the truth of God is revealed to us. Jesus comes full of grace and truth. And often when Jesus would speak to the people, he would stop by saying, ‘I tell you the truth.’ So the first aspect of God is light is that he is truth. He is the revealer of truth.

The second aspect of God, this essential aspect of him being light, has to do with his goodness, his perfection. He is perfectly good. He is morally perfect. God does not have an evil thought or do an evil thing, nor does he act with evil motives. We sing to God that he is holy. He is set apart. He is pure. And again, when John describes Jesus, it carries with it this same sense. He is full of grace and truth. But there's also that Jesus is without sin. He has moral perfection. And so this is the third conviction that John brings. Firstly, that Jesus is both God and man, not some ghostly spirit or just a man. He is both fully human, fully divine. Secondly, that he has reconciled us to God, but also this conviction that God is light.

And in the Gospels, Jesus is described as being the light as well. From this, then what John does is he talks about some of the false claims which actually go against this aspect of the nature of God. Earlier, I introduced a group of philosophical thought called Gnosticism. Gnosticism carries with it the sense of ‘to know.’ And so Gnostics were those who claimed to know secret knowledge, special knowledge. And it is in complete contrast to this understanding of God as light. So God is light. God reveals himself to us. Gnostics will say, ‘Oh, no, no, no. Truth can't just be found by anyone. It won't be revealed to everyone. It is only revealed to those who are in the know.’ And so they had an understanding that the truth was hidden, truth was private, and truth was held only by those within their circles.

The other aspect of Gnosticism, as we understand it historically and as we read in other scriptures such as the letter to Corinth, is that with the knowing of the secret truth, the hidden truth was also a detachment from any kind of moral goodness. And it came because of this spiritual elitism. You see, ‘I know something you don't know, right?’, this pride, this spiritual racism. And they gave themselves permission because they were in the know to do as they wish. And again, in the book of Corinth, if you read through that letter, you see Paul addressing Gnosticism as well, like, ‘We're spiritual. We've already attained everything that there is. We know, and therefore we can do whatever we wish.’

And so there's these three false claims that John speaks through there in verses 6, 8 ad 10. Makes it easy to say, doesn't it? And these are the three claims. Verse 6*, ‘If we claim to have fellowship with him, being God, and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and we do not live out the truth.’* Verse 8, *‘If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.’* And then verse 10*, ‘If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and His word is not in us.’* You see the parallels in those. They all start with the same phrase, ‘If we claim.’ But then he makes the point that the truth is not in us, his word is not in us.

Now, with these three false claims, the consistent falseness in these three is the saying that we can have a relationship with God, and yet detach that relationship with God from any kind of moral framework and say, ‘Well, I believe in God, but because I believe in God, (let's say put it in a more contemporary context), I'm covered by his grace and therefore nothing that I do is wrong.’

That's a wrong reading and a wrong understanding of what grace is. And there's a sense in which they (the Gnostics) detached because they were so spiritually elite, because they had the knowledge that no one else had, they could do as they pleased. And so the first claim was that they belong to God or they had fellowship with God. These would be people who were identifying as Christians, but they chose to walk in darkness, chose to ignore both the revelation of God's truth but also any aspect of moral goodness that goes with that.

And like I said, this is the story of Corinth. ‘We are so spiritual.’ And yet when you read their behaviour, Paul describes that it is so bad, even non-Christians were aghast at what they were doing. It’s am M-rated letter to actually read through some of the activities going on in that the church in Corinth.

And John says that's actually just living a lie. We may call it hypocrisy, that we make a claim to walk in the light, to actually live in the truth of God, and yet our behaviour is contrary to that. But John says we're living a lie.

The second claim was that, ‘I have no sin.’ Now, sin is not a common word that we often use. I love the way of understanding in an Old Testament concept, the word sin carries with it a sense of actually taking a bow and arrow, aiming for a target, but falling short. That's a lovely description of what sin is. It’s that falling short of the target, falling short of God's intention for us. Sin is falling short of what God's plan for us is. Another way to understand it is simply sin is our attitudes as well as our actions that are driven by ‘what I want’, that are driven by my desires and my needs, rather than what God would desire me to do.

And it seems as though, as John writes this letter, that some of the Christians who perhaps had been influenced by Gnosticism were teaching that they had progressed beyond sin. Now, it didn't only happen in those days. There have been movements throughout the course of Christian history where people have declared that they had attained such a degree of spiritual enlightenment, to such a degree of closeness to God, that it was no longer possible for them to sin.

And this seems to be what has happened here, that sin was completely no longer an issue in their life. Now, perhaps they were incredibly well behaved. I don't know. Perhaps their lives were completely aligned with God. And there is a part of me also that would love to think that in this lifetime we could come very close to that.

You know, I love writers such as Dallas Willard, Eugene Peterson. They have shaped my life incredibly, and I love their writings on spiritual formation. And there's a sense in which I think my heart's desire is, as Willard puts it, ‘that I would be so in love with Jesus that sin no longer holds any attraction.’ Like, that's it's no longer about a striving to try and do the right thing, to try and control the thoughts and actions. But my heart is so in love with Jesus that I no longer have any desire for sin. Like we understand that, and I think that's a really positive thing. It should be love that drives us towards the way in which we behave.

And I think that's a much better way than a sense of shame or a sense of punishment. For example, my faithfulness to Kathy. I want to be driven by love more than anything else. Not a sense of, well, ‘It's just the right thing to do or I'll get in trouble if I do something wrong,’. You understand what I'm saying? It should be the same with God. Our love for him should drive us.

But for whatever has happened here in the churches that John is writing to, they’ve just gone too far. They've claimed that they have no sin. And yet my understanding would be is that they do. They are not beyond the point of sinning, their hearts are not so aligned to God that sin is no longer possible for them. They obviously no longer have to struggle with pride or self-centredness or self-righteousness because they have become so good.

And what John says to them here, those who were claiming that they had no sin in their life, is he just says, “You’re self-deceived. You just don't understand yourself at all. You say you walk in the light, but that's what we're meant to do. We mean to walk in the light. But what you're claiming is that you are light itself. You are not that. You do have sin”. There's a sense here of self-righteousness, just a ‘not seeing’ into who we are, into our thoughts, into our heart, but claiming instead that we are completely without sin.

And there's a there's a great danger in spiritual pride when we start to see ourselves as more spiritual than somebody else for whatever reason, having this sense of like, our behaviour is better or our gifts are stronger or whatever it is. There's this great danger of developing this sense of, ‘Well, I'm part of the spiritual elite. I'm part of the upper class of Christianity.’ And it is so corrosive to relationships when we start to see others as less than us. The reality is we are all those who are saved simply by the grace of God. None of us comes before God by our own merit. We are all under grace.

The third false claim is that ‘I have not sinned.’ And it seems like as John is writing these, they sort of become more concerning as he goes on. And this is perhaps the most concerning, and it seems to be simply that there are people in the church who just don't care about what they do. “I haven't sinned.” “But wait, you just did then!” “Well, that's not sin. I get to determine what sin is.”

There's a sense here of also, “So what if I don't do something? There is no right or wrong. You've just got to determine that for yourself.” And this is very much the first sin that we read about in Scripture. The stepping into the place of God is actually taking from God the decision as to what is right and what is wrong, this knowledge of good and evil. “Well, no, no, no, that's not up to God to decide. This is now my decision to make. The knowledge of good and evil now resides in me.”

This seems to be the false claim they're making. It's taking the place of God. And John says, ‘For those who claimed that they had not sinned, then you're saying God is a liar, because God would say, “Well, no, no, no, you've all sinned. You've all fallen short of the mark.”’ I think there is a fair bit of this that goes on. I think culturally, there is this understanding that what is right and what is wrong is up for us to decide. So, if there is no God, if we are simply an animal with a human brain, then it is all up to us to decide our values and what is right and wrong. We get to vote on those who make the laws. And so in a real sense, we get to decide what is right and what is wrong.

But there's a problem with that, isn't there? Because then we become confused between what is legal and what is right. If something is legal, does that make it right? Does it? Or if something is illegal, does that make it wrong? There's a difference between that. And I think in our culture we confuse that. We see ourselves as the lawmakers, as those who put the lawmakers in place. And instead of having an understanding of morality or right and wrong, given to us by God, we see it as something that is now entrusted in our hands. In a sense, we have chosen to be the ones who make this decision on the knowledge of good and evil.

You know that it is legal for you to cheat on your spouse. It is completely legal for you to do that. And for me, that's just the easiest example to say. Sometimes we think when something's legal, it’s right. There are a whole range of examples where they're not, and I won't give any examples of things that are illegal to do, which I don't think are sins, because I can see it being broadcast on the news, ‘Baptist pastor encourages his congregation to do \_\_\_\_’. And I'm not going to do that because most of the things that are illegal, even if they're not sins, are still just damn stupid to do. So I'm not going to encourage you to do those all right? Leave that, haha.

So there are three false claims driven by spiritual arrogance that says that, ‘What I do means little or it means nothing.’ It's spiritual arrogance that says, ‘I can do as I want, regardless of God's revealed truth to us’, and John would say it's a spiritual arrogance that is deceived, that in a sense, we're not walking in God's light or in his truth. We're walking in our own and make believe ‘truth’.

But thankfully, John doesn't leave it there, because that would be quite a depressing end to the book. He gives us three promises, and each of these three promises are attached to the three false claims. And so these are the three in verses 7 & 9, and then at the beginning of chapter 2, verses 1 & 2*. ‘But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son, purifies us from all sin.’* Verse 9, *‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’* And then in chapter 2, *‘But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.’*

And these are three such beautiful verses just to dwell on. And I want to speak about the three of them in how they are a response to what we've heard about the false claims. The first one is this— walking in the light simply means to walk in the way of truth. To walk in God's light is to walk in his truth, to walk with integrity, to the revealed will of God.

And authentic Christian life is one that looks like Jesus. An authentic Christian life is one that is lived and loves like he did. It is selfless, it is gentle, and it is humble, because the way in which we walk matters. Following Jesus is the most foundational thing that you can do. Follow Jesus, read the gospels and know him.

One of the guys that mentored me early in my faith, he just encouraged me to read the gospels every year. And you know what? Every time I read them, I find that there's something fresh and there's something new. And there's something about the life of Jesus that just strikes me afresh and changes me. Follow Jesus, read the Gospels and know who he is.

And then there's so much more in terms of engaging with Jesus in prayer. You know, the Holy Spirit wants to reveal Christ to you. He wants to bring transformation to your lives. Walk in step, walk with him, walk in the light. Walk in the way of truth.

Don't just stop at the Gospels, don't make those four books the only thing you read. Read how the early church understood the life of Jesus and the implications of what it meant to walk in the light. The authentic Christian life is not about being perfect. And I do not expect to attain perfection in this life, but I'm looking forward to the next.

We are not perfect, but we do shun the hypocrisy of saying one thing and living another. I actually don't think that non-Christians have an expectation that Christians are perfect. I just think sometimes we behave like we think we are. Christians aren't perfect, and I don't think people expect us to be. But the expectation, and it's a right expectation, is that we live consistently with what we say we believe. I think that's fair, that we live consistently with what we say we believe. This is what it means to walk in the light. We need to live our lives truthfully, with all sincerity, and to live in such a way that you have nothing to conceal.

That's the beautiful thing about light, isn't it? It reveals. And when we walk in the light, we live in such a way that we have nothing to conceal and therefore nothing to fear. You know, like when you do stuff and you are afraid of getting caught out. Do you still remember that? I remember from my childhood, my teenage years. It's a horrible thing to live with that I've done something and someone's going to find out. The beautiful thing about living in the light is there's nothing to conceal, nothing to fear.

The second of the responses that John calls us to is confession. He asks us to actually confess our sins. Who do you confess to? Primarily you confess your sins to God. I love that Jesus incorporates in the Lord's Prayer there in this aspect of confession. ‘Forgive us our sins.’ Something that is part of the rhythm of our daily prayer. ‘Forgive us our sins, Lord, as we forgive the sins of others, those who sinned against us.’ Confess our sins to God.

But there's also great power and healing in confessing to a trusted friend. Sometimes that accountability is important, that we confess to God. But sometimes the confession to somebody who trusts, somebody who can hold that confession well and actually walk with us in that is such a powerful thing. We're called to confess our sins.

But I do want to say, don't be crushed by them, because that's the alternative. When we don't allow light in, sometimes the sins can become so crushing and so crippling for us in our spiritual life. Don't allow yourself to be crushed by them. Don't allow the conviction of sin to bury us in shame, but confess to God and to confess to a trustworthy friend.

The promise here from John is that God is faithful and he is just. He will forgive you. The hard part is forgiving yourself, right? You know that. But the promise here is that when we confess, he is faithful and he is just and he will forgive. He is full of grace. It's important to understand that grace is always freely given, but never to be treated lightly or cheaply.

Here's a question for you. Think about it for about 30 seconds. Do you own something that is of great value to you that cost you nothing? Perhaps it's a gift that somebody gave you. It cost you nothing. But it means the world. This is grace. Grace is precious. It is something that costs us nothing but is of such value because of the cost that it was to someone else. Treat God's forgiveness as a precious gift. Jesus humbled himself to come to us, and he humbled himself to the point of death on the cross. And that is precious. But it's also free.

So how does God see us? He sees us as imperfect people, yes, but he sees us and knows us as those who are loved by him and forgiven. When we confess, confession is an act of humility, and our identity is not as sinners. I grew up in an era where the world was divided into the sinners and the good people. And if you've ever heard something like that, and very much that was the life in which Jesus grew up, there were the sinners, and there were the righteous.

But that's not the way the world works. Our identity is not as sinners. We are those who sin like others sin. But confession is an act of humility because we put aside in justifying our sin, hiding our sin, making excuses for our sin, but simply coming before God saying, “Please forgive me.”

The third promise that John has here is about Christ as our advocate. This word advocate has a legal sense to it. I don't know if you've ever had the joy of going to court. I say that with a bit of tongue in cheek. But sometimes if we've had to go to court, we take an advocate with us, and it's this legal sense of somebody who comes and stands with us, somebody who is alongside us.

And often when we think of the advocate, who do we think about? The Holy Spirit? But when Jesus speaks about the advocate, he actually describes the Holy Spirit as another advocate, because who is the first advocate that we have? It's Jesus himself. And this my response, that as we read these words, that we would allow ourselves be overwhelmed by the love and the grace of God. That we would actually allow ourselves to imagine that we have Christ, our advocate, standing in the presence of the father, not trying to convince the father that we're innocent because we're not, but instead pleading for our acquittal on the basis of what Christ has done.

Paul, I think, says it beautifully, in 2 Corinthians 5, where he says that God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. So let's allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the love of God, by his grace, and by the beauty of what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. And this should give birth to worship and thanksgiving. Allow yourself to be brought into the story of the cross of Jesus Christ. This is love given for us, given for you, given for me.

But also, as John would say, this is given for the whole world. Allow ourselves to be brought into the story where we understand that, as John says, that if anyone does sin, and the assumption is that at times we will, that even then, we see that Jesus, our advocate, comes alongside us, and the Holy Spirit is here with us. He is our advocate, the one who stands with us in this world. But Jesus Christ is our advocate in the presence of God, not pleading our innocence, like I said, but presenting his work on the cross as grounds for our forgiveness, our acquittal. And John says he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only our sins, but for the sins of the whole world.

John invites us here and throughout the remainder of the letter to for us to walk with Jesus Christ, to walk in the light, to walk in truth. Christ has done all that is needed for us to come to him and to come to the father. In a very real sense, the path has been made clear and the invitation is to walk.

# Post-Sermon Prayer Speaker: Stephen Bates

Allow me to pray. Father, we thank you. We thank you for your love for us. We thank you for the grace that is so freely given to us. A grace that is not cheap, but a grace that was born at a great price, the death of Jesus Christ for us. Father, we thank you. We thank you for the forgiveness that we receive, the forgiveness that we have already received, but also the forgiveness that we receive when we come to you in humility, in a confession of our sins.

Father, by your Holy Spirit, increasingly show us what it means to walk in the truth and to walk in the light of Jesus Christ. Increasingly shape us into his likeness, growing a love for you and growing a love for one another. But Lord, may we always, always remember that we, as a people, are saved by grace.

Guard our hearts against pride or elitism. May our words and our actions always reflect the gentleness and the humility and the love of Jesus Christ the Father. We thank you for your love for us in Jesus Christ. We thank you for your sacrifice for us on the cross and the Holy Spirit. We thank you that you are our advocate, the one who stays with us, lives within us, is among us here, and will guide us in truth. Oh, glory be to you. Amen.

# Communion Speaker: Stephen Bates

In Matthew 26, as Jesus prepared for the cross, he shared a meal with his disciples, who at that stage still did not fully understand what was about to happen.

It says in Matthew 26, verse 26*, ‘While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat. This is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.” And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.’*

As we've spoken about the work of what God has done in Jesus Christ for us this morning, this is just a beautiful and a fitting way to finish, by taking these two elements of the bread and the cup, both of which speak of the grace that has been given to us. And we need to remember that, because our inclination of our hearts is to move back towards self, towards self-effort or, self-righteousness. We need to be reminded of the grace of God given to us and the cost, by which that came the bread, his body broken, and the blood representing the cup of the new covenant, bringing us into relationship with the father.

As we come this morning. I would love for us, as we take the bread and as we take the cup, to do so with the sense of thanks and worship, to actually say ‘This is part of our worship this morning,’ to come with a prayer of thanksgiving. So as you come, and as you take the piece of bread and as you take the cup, pray for yourself.

But, if you would like to, if you're next to someone you know and you're comfortable with doing it, why not pray with each other? Pray a prayer of thanks and worship to God for his gift to us of Jesus Christ. That means there may just be a little bit of a noise in the room as we do that, but I think we can live with that, right? Why don't we open our hearts and pray? And like I said, if you're comfortable to do that, pray with somebody near you.

Then, eat the bread, being reminded of Christ's death for us, and drink the cup, remembering that we are part of God's family, reconciled to him. Everyone is welcome to participate in this. If you, as someone who knows and loves Jesus Christ, who is willing to have received the grace that is freely given to us, then please feel free to take part in this morning.

There are tables to the front and one at the back. You're welcome to in your time to go and grab one. And like I said, enter this with a sense of praise and thanksgiving. So let's do that.

# Worship Singing

**Song:** God With Us by Bryan Torwalt, Katie Torwalt

# Post-Worship Prayer Speaker: Kathy Bates

Jesus. We thank you, as we stand in that moment and we just look again at the extent of your love, that you are our advocate. God, we want to thank you. We want to thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ. And we want to thank you for the love that drove you, father, to give your only son for us.

May we take hold of your grace and your love in increasing measure, Lord, may they never be just words or a concept. God, may our hearts love you back. May we hold your grace as the greatest gift. God, may we be so eager to share that gift with others as well.

Thank you. Lord. We just ask your blessing as we walk from this place this week and go into our weeks. Continue to expand us, that we might grasp more and more of your love and continue, Lord, to shape us. That we may give more and more of your love as well. Amen.

# Conclusion Speaker: Kathy Bates

We want to invite you for a prayer this morning. We have our prayer team along the front, and I do have this sense that (sorry, I get teary when the spirit moves in me), I do have this sense that God would have each of us hold more of the love of God expressed through Jesus.

Now, Paul talks about that we would know the height and depth and breadth of the love of God, that there's always more that we would know. And so, you know, as we pray today, we can pray for you that you might actually be able to grasp more of that and not just as head knowledge, but actually grasp a fresh encounter with the love of God. And we'd love to pray with you into that space.

I will also pray with you into anything else. But I pray that this week you'll walk from this place knowing that you walk in the grace and the love of Jesus, and that that would be a precious place that takes you back to Jesus again and again throughout your week. Bless you. Please join us for morning tea if you'd like to do that to.

# Online Outro Speaker: Kathy Bates

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

\*Names have been changed to protect privacy.