

Bridging the gap

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Date: 24 November 2024

Preacher: Tim O'Brien

[0:00] Good morning, everybody. Good morning. Very warm welcome to Union Baptist Church. It's great to have you with us this morning. Let some of you get your seats. And yeah, so nice to be packed in this warm, dry space with the cold, wet, windy weather outside. And really lovely to see you all for this time of worship this morning. And we gather as God's family.

For those of you that don't know me, my name's Andrew. I'm pastor here at Union Baptist Church and it's my privilege to welcome you. I'd like to welcome you specially if you're new to us this morning or visiting with us today. I'd like to especially welcome the family of Alison and Ollie, who are bringing Aaron to be dedicated today. And it's lovely to see some old friends and familiar faces as well. And we also welcome another old friend today, Tim O'Brien, who's here with his wife, Elizabeth. Tim's a previous pastor of Union Baptist Church and he's going to be preaching today. And we'll hear more from him later, but great to have you both with us. Now, having a baby is an exciting change that we celebrate and give thanks for.

And we're in a season of quite a few changes here at Union Baptist Church at the moment. At the church members meeting last Tuesday, we had a really encouraging time sharing exciting progress of the Living Stones project. I saw a video of that and it's looking fantastic.

The balustrade, the stage in place now. This is a building project which is transforming the worship space at the front of our building. And we're getting closer to completion, which is really exciting. We look forward to moving in sometime in early 2025. And we also shared on Tuesday an initial overview of our strategic plan for 2025, which we'll be saying more about in the weeks to come. The other big change that most of you will have heard about, hopefully, if you saw my email on Thursday, is the news that Lynn, our administration team leader, will be stepping down from her role at the end of the year after serving us for around six years and serving us with such hard work and commitment and dedication for that time. Lynn has been an amazing blessing to us during that time.

[2:12] She has led our church admin and finances and the operation of the hub. So please be praying for her as she prepares for a new role in the local school. And please pray for the church leadership as we seek God's guidance for restructuring that role and seeking a person or persons that God might be calling to take on that important work. But as we prepare now to worship God, I'm going to read from Psalm 34, verses 1 to 8.

I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord. Let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant. Their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called and the Lord heard him. He saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. I'm going to invite our musicians to come and take their positions and let's come to God in prayer as we prepare ourselves to worship him.

Lord, help us to praise you today through whatever circumstances that we might find ourselves in, whether we're feeling joyful or anxious when we stepped into this gathering. Help us to seek you this morning. We seek your presence and we seek your face. We invite your Holy Spirit to come now and move amongst us. May we taste your goodness this morning. May we see your goodness this morning. May we praise and glorify your name in this place today. In Jesus' name. Amen. We invite you to stand now and our musicians are going to lead us as we praise God together. Let's

praise him now.

Thank you.

In desperation, I turned to heaven and spoke your name into the night.

[4:58] Then through the darkness, your loving kindness tore through the shadows of my soul.

The work is finished, the end is written, Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.

[6:40] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

All of the day, the salvation in your name, Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Jesus Christ, my living hope. Oh God, you are my living hope.

[9:07] Amen. Do please sit down. Now it's my pleasure to welcome Alison and Ollie with Aaron and Caleb to come and join me here for Aaron's dedication.

Come on up, guys. Welcome. Now this is a really exciting occasion for us to celebrate with this lovely family. We welcome Ollie and Alison and Caleb who are coming to give thanks for this guy here.

This is Aaron and we're here to celebrate the gift of Aaron and to praise God who is the one who gives all life. And today we acknowledge that children are not just the property of parents, although it's a special blessing for you guys, but they are entrusted, children are entrusted by God into the hands of parents to love and to nurture and to teach them God's ways.

Now part of what we're doing today is seeking God's blessing on Aaron and asking for God's help and equipping for Ollie and for Alison as they bring up Aaron and Caleb as well.

Children are an amazing gift, not just to parents, but to the whole church family. That's why we celebrate together as a church family today. And part of what we're doing today is promising that this church will be a place where children and young people will be welcomed and taught and loved and prayed for.

[10:39] And that's really important to us here at Union Baptist Church because the Bible calls us to see in children a sign of the kingdom of God. Aaron to us today is a living sign that God welcomes us without condition.

He lavishes his love and grace on everyone who comes to him with empty hands and open hearts. So I'm going to pray now to the God who is the inventor of parenthood and the source of all love and life and goodness.

Let's pray together. Living Lord, you are the source of life. No one is born and no one dies without your knowledge or outside of your love.

We thank you for the birth of Aaron and for his life and all the amazing potential which rests in him. We also thank you for the love which brought him to life and which continues to surround him today. We know how much he depends on those who care for him. But we believe that you will give Ollie and Alison all the wisdom and patience and skill which they will need as they parent him.

[11:44] So we present Aaron to you now with all our thanks and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. Now part of what Ollie and Alison are doing today is acknowledging the amazing privilege it is for them to be parents of Aaron as well as Caleb but to acknowledge that being parents is a challenging task.

I think you'd agree with me with that. I think any other parents in the room would agree with that. And that is a challenging task and they can't do it in their own strength and none of us can do it in our own strength. They need the help of God and they also need the help of a loving church family which is why we're gathering together today.

So we're going to ask a couple of questions to Ollie and to Alison and we've got a question for Aaron's brother Caleb and we've got a question for all of us as well. A couple of questions for us. And I think Aaron wants to answer a question as well because he's very vocal which is great.

Yeah there's grandma. Great. Okay so we've got a question to Ollie and Alison on the screen there so hopefully you can see that. So Ollie and Alison, do you thank God for the gift of your son Aaron and do you accept the joys and the duties that parents are doing?

We do. Wonderful. And the next question. Alison and Ollie, do you promise to bring Aaron up within the Christian community and by God's grace so to live that he will be nurtured by Christian love?

[13:10] We do. That's wonderful. Okay next question. This is a question for you Caleb. So Caleb will you promise to love and help care for your brother? Yes. Fantastic.

That's wonderful. And we'll pray for you in that as well. Now we've got a question for all of us as the church family of Aaron and we have a very important role to play as he grows up.

So I'd like to invite you all to stand if you're able so that we can stand with this family in pledging our support and prayers to them. So if you can join him with a hearty we do if you agree with the statement.

So gathered here as members of this congregation and as representatives of the wider church of God, do you promise to offer Aaron and his family your love and support?

We do. That's wonderful. And another question. Being faithful in prayer, will you share your faith with him by word and example? We will.

[14:12] That is wonderful. Do please sit down. Thank you so much. Now, I'm going to ask Ollie and Alison now, what names have you given your son?

This is Aaron Robert Paul Farncombe-Walbank. Wonderful. So I'd like to have a quick cuddle with this very special young man, if I may.

If I hold you like that, you can still see mum and dad. So we'd like to welcome you especially. So Aaron, Robert, Paul Farncombe-Walbank, we greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus and we welcome you into the community of God's people.

Aaron, we pray that one day as a disciple of Jesus Christ, you will follow him through the waters of baptism and that in a life of faithful witness, you'll bear the fruit of his spirit.

So I'd like to pray a special prayer of blessing for Aaron. So you might like to raise up your palms towards Aaron as a sign that we want to invite God to bless Aaron now.

[15:28] So Aaron, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace this day and always.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So we'd like to, I'd really like to welcome Aaron officially and he's found my name badge, which is very exciting. That's my name badge. Can I take you for a little walk up and down, Aaron, just to introduce you?

Caleb, would you like to come with us? Yeah? Okay. Right, Caleb, you lead the way. And we're just going to introduce Aaron. He's met a lot of people already, but do give him a smile and a wave.

There's Joanne. Hi, Joanne. Hi, Linda. There's your aunties. Hi there. Hi, Bill. Hi, Ferly. Hi, Jen. Hi, John.

Hi, Sarah. Hi, Colin. Hi, Pam. There's David. There's Beryl. Shirley. Hello. Hello, Kate. Hello, Rachel. Hi, Cash.

[16:30] Hi, Evelyn. Hi, Daniel. Hi, Elisa. Hi, Ryan. Hi. Hi, Roger. Hello, Guy. Hi. Hi, Lucas.

Hi, Amos. Hi, Serena. Great. Okay. If we go back up. Let's go. All right. Maybe we can take a different route back. Let's come around this side, just to be different.

It's Jean and Graham. There's Mike and Drush. Hi, there. Hi, everyone. There's Jean. There's Marianne. These are all part of your family.

Some of your friends. Okay. It's your grandparents here. Okay. More grandparents. Aunties and uncles. Yeah. Wonderful.

Well done. Okay. So, I'm enjoying this cuddle, but I think I need to give you back now, because I need to get something else. I might have to go. Yeah. Okay. There you go. Okay.

[17:29] Thank you very much. Well done. So, I've got something for you guys now. First of all, that's a certificate of his dedication.

Now, we also... Does Aaron like books? He likes to eat them. He likes to eat them. Okay. Okay. That's good. We've got a book for Aaron as a gift from the church, and this is the Jesus Storybook

Bible.

So, it's a Bible for him. It explains the Bible stories, and it all points to Jesus and how amazing Jesus is. So, given that he quite likes to eat books at the moment, could I give that to you to look after for him, and then when he's ready to read it, maybe you could read it to him with your mom and dad.

Is that all right? Okay. That's great. I'll leave you the bag as well. So, great. Now, we're going to ask a couple of family members to pray for Aaron and the family. So, if I can invite Caroline, his grandma, and Kirstie, his auntie, to come up, and they're going to pray for him.

No. He's going first. Are you happy to use that? Just hold it about here. All right. There you go. Lord Jesus, today we give special thanks for the gift of Aaron to Ollie, Allison, and Caleb, and to the wider family, for the joy and blessing he brings, and for the promise of his life in the future.

[18:55] We pray for wisdom for Ollie and Ollie as they bring up Aaron, and that he will know your love and truth in his life. Thank you that we can all rely on you for your strength, love, and comfort as we go through life.

And we pray that this will be especially true for Ollie, Ollie, Caleb, and Aaron as they journey through life together. We pray that Aaron will always know your love surrounding him, and that in time he will come to know you as his own personal saviour and Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Father God, we thank you for the precious gift of Aaron and for this special dedication day.

Thank you that you made it so clear in your word that even the smallest child is precious in your sight, made by you, loved by you, designed to know and be known by you.

We thank you that Aaron will be brought up with the knowledge that he has chosen and loved by God, and pray that you will equip Allison and Ollie with all the wisdom they need to raise Aaron with a deep understanding of this truth.

[20:00] Lord, your word teaches us that you already have good plans for Aaron's life. We thank you for the blessing that Aaron is, for his unique character, gifts, and place in your world.

We pray that you will nurture and protect his joyful and gentle spirit, and that he will thrive and flourish without hindrance. So, Father, on this day of dedication, we pray this blessing over Aaron. May his eyes see your face. May his ears hear your voice. And may his heart love you always. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you so much. And I'm just going to say a prayer on behalf of the church family, so I'm going to ask Miriam to come and do that for us now. Father God, we thank you so much for the gift of family.

Thank you that you are our father. Thank you that you love us so much. And I thank this lovely family that Aaron's been born into. We want to pray especially for Allison and Ollie as they parent both Aaron and Caleb.

[21:00] Thank you for their desire to show your love to their children. And I pray that you help them as they do that with the various challenges that come their way. Lord, help them as mother and father, husband and wife to lead this family in the way that you want it to go.

I pray for Caleb and his really special role as a big brother. Lord, thank you so much for the special bond that siblings can have. And I pray that as they grow together, they will grow together closer to you as well.

Yeah, Lord, we thank you for this family. Pray for us as a church family that we would know how best to support and love this family and to fulfill the promises that we've made today. Thank you that you love us all so much.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Well, thank you so much. Thank you so much for bringing Aaron to be dedicated. I'll let you go back to your seats. But let's have a round of applause for Aaron and his family.

Thank you.

[22:25] Thank you. And how God will use him according to his purposes. So we're going to spend some time worshipping God now. I'm going to invite the musicians to come back up. We're going to sing a song that Aaron's family have chosen.

Come praise and glorify our God. So let's stand and let's praise God for his goodness, for all that he's done for us. Thank you. Come praise and glorify our God.

The Father and our Lord. In Christ he has in heavenly lands, his blessings on his glory.

For pure and painless in his sight, he destined us to be. And now we've been adopted through his son eternally.

To the praise of your glory. To the praise of your mercy and grace.

[23:45] To the praise of your glory. You are the God who saves. And now we've made it through his

be the head of all his purpose to fulfill To the praise of your glory
To the praise of your mercy and grace To the praise of your glory You are
the God who saves

Praise and glory by our God, for we believe the word. And through our faith we have a seal, the spirit of the Lord.

The spirit guarantees our hope until redemption's done. Until we join in endless race to God, the three of us.

To the praise of your glory, to the praise of your mercy and grace. To the praise of your glory, you are the God who saves.

To the praise of your glory, to the praise of your mercy and grace. To the praise of your glory, you are the God who saves.

[25:55] Yes, Father God, we thank you for what you've done for us. And we give you praise and we give you glory. Because you have adopted us into your family so that we can call you our Father.

You're the creator of the universe and you're the one in whom all things hold together. And yet we can come to you as a daddy, as our Father. And we can experience your loving, experience your presence, experience your closeness.

And we thank you that that's because of you sending Jesus to us to be our rescuer. And we want to continue to praise you now. We thank you so much for what you've done for us. Amen. Let's continue to praise God.

We're going to sing rescuer. Don't forget the fist bump and the hey. Let's praise God. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[27:30] Let's pray.

Let's pray. For the one the world ignores He is pasture for the weary Rest for those who strive For the good Lord is the way The truth, the life Yes, the good Lord is the way The truth, the life He's our rescuer He's our rescuer We are free from sin forevermore How sweet the sound How grace so fast We will praise the Lord our rescuer So come and be chainless Come and be fearless Come to the fort of Calvary There is redemption For every affliction

Here at the fort of Calvary So come and be chainless Come and be fearless Come to the fort of Calvary There is redemption For every affliction Here at the fort of Calvary He's our rescuer He's our rescuer We are free from sin forevermore Oh how sweet the sound Oh how grace so fast We will praise the Lord our rescuer We will praise the Lord our rescuer Amen, amen. Do please sit down.

In a couple of minutes The children, young people And WOW Extra will go out to their groups But we just want to share A few important announcements About things which are Which are coming up in the In the next days or weeks So the first one is that Today is the first rehearsal For our Christmas choir We're going to be rehearsing After the morning service Today and for the next two weeks So if you're able to stick around After the service Grab a quick coffee Come back up here at 12 o'clock We'll be practicing from 12 to 12.40 If you love singing carols No experience is necessary But come along and be part of that Of that choir So that we can bless other people At our carol service Which we hope that lots and lots of people Will be coming to We've got these postcards Hopefully some of you have picked one of these up And these advertise our Christmas events and services You can pick one up on your way out Do please take a few And think about friends, neighbours Colleagues Other people that you could give these to

Further afield, Lord, we pray for our world. We pray for world leaders. For President Biden.
[42:26] For President-elect Trump. President Putin. President Zelensky. Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Our own Prime Minister Keir Starmer. And other leaders across Europe and the globe. We pray that they will be people of peace. Where there is hatred and distrust, Lord, bring understanding and a determination and a resolve to find solutions rather than conflict.

Guide them, too, as they seek solutions to the worldwide problems of immigration and climate change. We, too, pray, Lord, for terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

We pray, Lord, that they will seek peaceful solutions rather than bloodshed and hatred. You are the God of miracles. We pray, Lord, for all sorts of organizations and nations who are causing so much hate and bloodshed.

And, Lord, we know that many of the world's problems do not have easy solutions. But we pray, Lord, for talk rather than conflict. So, Lord, we come to you.

[43:46] We thank you for Andrew, for our elders and our deacons. We pray you will give them wisdom, insight and boldness as they lead us. And where there are gaps in our leadership teams, we pray for the right people to come forward.

And, Lord, we pray, too, for our Christmas activities. We just pray that for all those activities that there are, we pray, Lord, that your peace will be there, your presence will be there.

And, Lord, in power and in a way, Lord, that draws people to you. And we pray for people, Lord, who as yet don't know you. We pray they will come to know you through some of our Christmas activities.

So, Lord, we just thank you, too, for reminder and recollection of Tim O'Brien. We thank you, Lord, for bringing him back to us this morning.

We thank you for his time here as pastor. And we pray you'll bless and use him in his current work for you. But we pray, too, Lord, that you'll use him here today. Speak to us through him.

[44:49] Open the eyes of our understanding. Help us to listen and to move forward with you. Lord, we know you've heard our prayers. But help us to believe and to look forward to your answers.

In Jesus' name, amen. I'm going to have our Bible reading now. Is O'Brien ready to bring us our Bible reading?

Are you okay to do the Bible reading? Thanks, O'Brien. Good morning.

Good morning. All right. So, our scripture reading is taken from 1 Timothy 1-6.

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, priors, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

[46:17] This is good and pleases God, our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of truth.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed at the proper time.

Amen. Thank you so much, O'Brien. And now, from one O'Brien to another, I'd like to welcome Tim O'Brien. And it's a pleasure to welcome Tim today with Elizabeth, his wife.

So, if you can come and join me, Tim. I'm aware that you're a very familiar face to a lot of people here, but there'll be a good number of people here who may not know you. So, can you tell us, what is your connection to Union Baptist Church?

Yeah, well, first thing to say is it's lovely to be here again with Elizabeth. So, I was Associate Minister here from 2002 to 2011, so for those nine years.

[47:25] So, if you're new to church here, you may have heard the name John Roberts mentioned as well, as Senior Minister and John and I served, so I was the Associate. Brilliant. And can you tell us where you are now and what you're doing now and about your family as well?

Yeah, thanks, Andrew. So, we're living in Didcot, and so when I came from Union Baptist Church, I went to become one of the ministers at Didcot Baptist Church, which is in Oxfordshire, and I was there for 11 years, and then stood down from that role about two years ago, and then moved to a role at BMS World Mission.

So, looking to support mission workers around the world, but from the centre at Didcot, so sort of online meetings and then face-to-face when they come to the UK. So, Elizabeth's here, and hopefully you'll be able to have a cup of tea or coffee with Elizabeth later.

I've got a son who's now 20. You may remember him sort of about this high. I now look up to him and strain my neck. So, he's at University of Bath, where he's doing international development with economics as a degree, and he's currently doing a placement year. It's his third year.

And then we've got a daughter, Amy, who's 18. She's at home at the moment, but she's still with us, living at home. Brilliant. Well, can I pray for you? Sure, Andy. And then we're looking forward to hearing from you.

[48:42] Thank you. Father God, we thank you so much for Tim, and we pray for your blessing on him, and Elizabeth and Matthew and Amy. Thank you for calling them to your work, and thank you for the role Tim now has with BMS World Mission, a partner of ours, helping people to serve you around the world.

And we thank you for Tim's willingness to serve us this morning by bringing your word to us and unpacking this wonderful passage to us. And I pray that your Holy Spirit will be working in Tim and in each one of us as well to hear what you're saying to us and to prompt us to respond appropriately.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Andrew. So, the first thing I'd like to say, really, is just to repeat how delighted we are to be here today.

It's a privilege to be here and to be sharing in this way. It's a pleasure to be here, and it's a pleasure to be here, and it's a pleasure to be here, and it's a pleasure to be here today.

It's a pleasure to be here today. But as I was reflecting back on what to preach on today, I've been sent through some details of the sermon series that you've been looking at over recent weeks and had the privilege of being here as well just a few weeks ago when Andrew was inducted.

[50:20] And I'm aware that you've been doing a series on the temple. So, looking back into Old Testament history, that place where God revealed himself in a special way to the Israelite nation, and that series that you've been thinking about, and before then, I think you were looking at the tabernacle.

In fact, the day I was last here, if I'm right, Alan Ensink was about to set up a tented tabernacle in the hall here. So, yeah, I didn't get to hear the sermon itself, but I was aware of the preparation for it.

And as you think about that temple, and as perhaps over recent weeks, or perhaps if you're here for the first time today, just reflecting on the glory and holiness of God, I wondered whether, actually, as you're thinking about that, about the holiness of God, the splendour and majesty of God, it would seem that an appropriate place as you progress from there as a church would be to think about another aspect that perhaps took that and thought about, well, just the wonder of the glorious nature of God.

The temple was an amazing place. You can read about it in the Old Testament, the way it was built, and the gold that was used, and all the different tabernacles as well, with the furnishings, and everything was done in a particular way.

And then, to move on from that, to think about the holiness and splendour of God. But the reality is, as we think about where we are in the year, and what you're going to be looking at, I suspect in the next week or so, you're going to be moving to talk about Advent, and the nativity.

[51:57] And so, having been there in that place of the temple, and thinking about all the splendour of that and the holiness of God, suddenly we're at a place where we're standing by a manger in a stable.

Our eyes are turned to that place. And it seems that we could think, temple on the one hand, manger in the other, is there a gap in this kind of transition, not just in terms of the timescales, but in terms of the context.

And yet, in the manger, the reason we're looking at it is not because of its wooden nature, but because of who's in it. And the fact that shepherds are going to come and proclaim that a son has been born.

Magi are going to come and kneel in worship before the one who is in the manger. And it's just been a wonderful thing today to be able to be here and see Aaron, and to think about the beauty

and the potential of a life, and what can be achieved.

We think about that in terms of a human life, with Aaron, and I think it was Aunty Kirstie, who talked about him being a precious gift. Grandma Caroline, about the promise of his life in the future.

[53:14] And when we come to this manger, we look up there, at one who is lying there as a baby, with huge, huge potential.

But that gap is real, between the temple and the baby. And maybe in our lives, when it comes to thinking about the Christian faith, we sense there's a gap.

Mind the gap. Tourists love it, don't they? Have you ever seen them with their Mind the Gap T-shirts? I can't get enough of it. But whilst there's a humorous side to it, actually in our lives, maybe when we think of Mind the Gap, it's not so funny.

Because we think of our dreams and hopes of all that we thought life was to be, and we look at the reality of how life is for us right now, and it feels like there's a gap at times.

Maybe in our lives you've known that at various times of life. Perhaps even today you're knowing it. Maybe there's an aching void, and there's that sense of things that have been in the past done, or undone, that have led us to a place where we're feeling just that, undone.

[54:23] And we feel that there is this gap in our lives, and we feel very far away from the God of the temple, very far away from all that talk of majesty, and we feel a gulf.

So what do we do? Well, perhaps we try to fill the hole ourselves. We try to do the best we can. We try in our own strength to cram in more and more activity, perhaps a little bit frenetically, and just try consciously or unconsciously to subdue the pain.

But there is another way. There's a way that the Bible has pointed us to. There's another way that God has pointed us to.

In fact, the only true way. We're introduced to Jesus Christ. Not only Jesus Christ in the manger and nativity, but Jesus Christ, the mediator.

Did you notice that phrase coming up in the reading? Jesus Christ, the mediator. Verses five to six. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

[55:35] Maybe as we've thought over recent weeks about the temple and thought about the shedding of blood and the sacrificial lamb and all those things that took place there, maybe we glimpsed a foreshadowing of what was to come in Jesus Christ.

And perhaps as we think about the nativity and as we think about some of the things that were said when this little baby was presented at the temple, a bit like presenting Aaron here, Jesus was taken to the temple to be presented.

And we can think of the words of Simeon or Anna, my eyes have seen your salvation. She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

And in the same way that as Aaron was held here and walked around the room, so we saw a glimpse of the potential of this life and the wonder of him right now, so in Jesus Christ, people looked and saw the potential of redemption.

In the temple, we saw Jesus pointed to as fully God. And maybe we think of Jesus in some way as fully God, far removed from us, out of reach, confined to the theology books and the stained glass windows.

[56:52] And then we come to the nativity and the stable and the manger. And don't we see in that somewhat squalid condition something of humanity and maybe of humanness?

And maybe in our lives when we think about Jesus, perhaps there's some notion of who Jesus was and we think, well, I think he probably existed. I think he was perhaps a good man.

Maybe I'd go as far as to say he was a moral teacher. He did kind things to people. Maybe we view Jesus in that way.

Which is it to be? Temple? Stable. Majesty, splendour, glory, squalid conditions, straw, animals. The wonderful truth is that Jesus was fully human and fully God. Fully human and fully God.

[57:57] Fully God and fully human. Do we have a one-sided view in our thinking today? Perhaps seeing God as majestic and holy, but not seeing

that he has any real place in our day-to-day lives?

Or seeing Jesus as human, someone to be listened to, maybe even read some of the things he wrote, but not worshipped, not adored, not laying our lives before him and asking him to make us the people that he wants us to be.

But Jesus came as both. Fully God and fully man. That's why we can look at both the temple and the stable as both pointers to the true nature of Jesus.

We need to hold them both together in a beautiful tension. I don't know whether any of you have seen the BBC adaptation of the Nativity. It was done probably ten or so years ago now.

If you haven't seen it, I'd recommend it. It's a four-part series. In fact, I think it was written by the guy who wrote EastEnders, but that may or may not sway you to want to watch it, but I recommend it.

[59:04] And in there, one of the wise men is talking about... Sorry, not the wise men. Yes, yes, one of the wise men talking about when Jesus came and they're talking about the kind of the philosophy and thinking through who he could possibly be.

And they talk about Jesus as a potential bridge between heaven and earth. A bridge. When we think about the gap we were just exploring and that chasm when we think about God and ourselves and our experience and where we're at, do we see it as a helpless chasm that can't be filled or do we look to Jesus and see him as the bridge, as the necessary mediator spanning the divide between the temple and the stable, between God and humanity.

And it's a profound theological reality, as Jesus being both God and man, that he is the only one in all of humanity that has been able to span that bridge, that has been able to act as the one spanning the divide and the gulf between who we are, knowing the real things inside us, knowing who we are, the things we wouldn't want to tell the person sitting next to us about what we know about ourselves, and a true, loving, perfect God.

And it's only through Jesus as the bridge that we are able to come in all our humanity, failings, frailty, fallenness, and stand before a righteous, holy God.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. We can't bridge the gap ourselves.

[60:53] We may try, we may strive, we may keep on trying, but we can't do it. Instead, we're to look to Christ, Jesus Christ. Do you remember, for those who were there, when Andrew got inducted just a few weeks ago at the induction service, some of the words that were stated, God has called me to trust in his strength, in my weakness.

If you're feeling weak and vulnerable today, if you're feeling that you don't know what the answer is and don't know where to turn, can I encourage us to remember that it's not about our own strength, it's about coming in our weakness and trusting in God and in his strength.

Recognising our own weakness is important in life, but so is also recognising the strength of God.

And at the induction service, the preacher was a chap called John Risbridge, and as he was preaching, he got to a bit where he started to talk about Andrew and what the service is really is.

In fact, it's an induction service for Andrew to talk about the type of person he should be as a minister and what he should do as a minister. And John got to a bit where he started talking about vision and what Andrew's vision should be.

So here we are in this service a few weeks back, right at the heart of this, Andrew the minister.

What is the vision of Andrew, the senior minister, going to be?

[62:24] What is he going to be doing? What is he going to be envisioning and seeking to bring about in the life of the church? Right at the heart of who you are and who we are today as Union Baptist Church.

And John said this, hitch your wagon to Christ. The reality is, of course, that primarily, even if it's an induction service for the senior minister, the words were not pointing ultimately to Andrew, but through Andrew, pointing to Jesus Christ, because that is where the strength is.

And it's the same whether senior minister, member of a congregation, or just human being. We're all called to that same thing, to hitch our wagon to Jesus, because he is our strength, he is our hope, he is our salvation.

It's true of us, true. We're to live as servants of Jesus Christ. There's a song that sometimes Christians sing called Cornerstone. It talks about weak made strong in the Saviour's love.

So we're to pray for God's enabling, God's direction, God's empowering. And we can come to him in prayer. Prayer, not as a last resort, but prayer as a first resource.

[63:46] Come to God in prayer. Bring him all our lives, everything that is within us that we want his help, all those things that trouble us, our family members as well, bring them to God, not as a last resort, but as a first resource.

And when our structures seem to crumble away around us, let us look to Jesus Christ, the rock. So as we encounter the grandeur and majesty of Christ, so we become aware of our failings.

And so often in life and in the Bible, we can realise that's true. Peter, realising who Jesus truly was, fell at his knees, go away from me, Lord, I'm a sinful man.

John the Baptist, I must become less, he must become more, greater. Isaiah, woe to me, I'm ruined, I'm a man of unclean lips, I live among a people of unclean lips.

And sometimes we can find that as we look to God and his majesty, so more and more of our own frailty appears. And yet, we're called to come to him.

[64:49] So I want to say to each of us today, as the first real application point, have we come to Jesus as our mediator, mediator, as the one who is spanning that gulf in our lives.

C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Screwtape Letters*, and in there, he talks about someone who was just on the point of thinking about coming to Jesus Christ, and they thought, yes, I'm going to, I'm going to become a Christian.

And then they thought, oh, you know what, I'm going to go for lunch. I'll do it after lunch. And they went out and they saw a paperboy and they saw a bus and blah, blah, blah, came back and kind of forgot all about it.

Sometimes in life, there is the point of realising that there are times in our lives where God is speaking to us, pivotal moments in our lives where we need to turn to him and come to him in the silence of our own situation and offer him ourselves and say, God, please do what only you can do.

Maybe today for one of us in this room, today is such a day. Bible talks in Corinthians, now is the day of salvation. Maybe for one of us today, today is the day of salvation.

[66:06] Talked in the passage we were looking at today in 1 Timothy 2 about Jesus coming at just the proper time. Well, maybe today is just the proper time for one of us today.

Amazing love, how can it be? One of our songs we sing. I'm forgiven because you were forsaken and I'm accepted, you were condemned. I'm alive and well, your spirit is within me because you died and rose again.

It's where we find true peace, mediation, bridging the divide, creating in us again that situation of who we were meant to be, created with a loving creator, to God and being in right relationship with him.

If any of you would like to pray with Andrew after service or one of the other leaders, I'm sure I'll be delighted to pray with anyone today if you want to take that step. But is it just about us? We focused a lot on Jesus being our bridge.

What about standing in the gap for others? This passage that we're looking at today calls us to pray for those in authority. I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

[67:26] It's right that we should be praying for King Charles, right that we should be praying for our own ruler from around the world, from whichever country we come. It's great that, as Colin was praying, praying for world leaders.

And so this week, are we going to be praying for our MPs? As on Friday, they come to the second reading in Parliament of the terminally ill adults end of life bill.

Important step in the life of our country. Are we going to be praying for our MPs as they debate and make those decisions? As COP has just been taking place, are we going to be praying for world leaders that they would fulfil all that they have signed up to and really strive to bring about a world where there is justice?

And praying for those in authority at other times too. And we're to pray through Christ. Interesting, isn't it? As we're thinking about the temple and we're thinking about the stable and how different they seem to be, that actually, when we're praying for those in authority, the way we're to do it is to pray through Christ, the one who is in the stable.

And it's only through praying in the name of Jesus and with his strength and in line with his will that actually we can be praying properly for those in authority over us.

[68:46] So, thinking about ourselves, bridging the gap with us, with God, praying for those in authority and standing in the gap for them.

But what about others, friends, neighbours, colleagues, people we meet at the water cooler? God our Saviour, verse 3, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth for there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

It's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? All people. In fact, if we didn't hear it, let's say it again, all people. Jesus wants everyone to turn to him.

And are we seeking to be bridges to those around us where we live and where we have our community? It's great as a church that Union Baptist Church is supporting so many mission workers around the world.

When I was associate minister here, one of the mission workers we used to support was a chap called Andrew Wingfield who was in Tanzania with his wife Miriam. And it seems to have worked out all right for them, didn't it?

[70:00] Yeah. But also to know that the work of supporting EI is continuing as well through Jessica and Adrian, Ibrahim and Susan.

I know you're supporting Matt and Rachel McNulty as well. And with BMS, supporting Claire Bedford and Philip and Rosemary Halliday in France and Mark and Andrea Hotchkins in Chad. It's one of my privileges as a pastoral care worker with BMS to be supporting many of them and meeting with them regularly online to meet with them and to talk and pray together and share life. And also that it's been great having Chris Manktelow with us at BMS over this last year. Chris is our writer at BMS so if you sign on to the website and have a look there you might see or you might get emails coming through or Engage magazine or the prayer magazine that comes that Chris edits and I don't want to make him blush but Chris has done a great job this year and is a very significant part of who we've been within BMS and what we're seeking to achieve around the world and yeah it's been great.

But as well as mission around the world what are we doing locally? Are we seeking to build bridges to those in our community to be a bridge pointing others to the saviour?

[71:25] The mission statement of Union Baptist Church to be a community of Christians who love God follow Jesus and share the hope which we have in him? How are we seeking to do that?

This year's Church Strategic Plan talks of growing disciples who make disciples and maybe this week in the same way that we talked about there being just the proper time for us to think about God now is the day of salvation maybe there's someone we work with or a colleague or a university mate or someone we meet in a club are we seeking in Christ to share the good news with them as well?

This wonderful news that we have of a God who loves us maybe this week is just the proper time for them to receive a word to ponder on the word of faith maybe an invitation to the carol service on the 15th of December maybe an invitation to that shepherd's nativity on the 7th of December maybe this week is a time to really seek to be praying who God are you wanting me to reach out to?

Could be anyone you look at the people in the Bible they're not the people we'd have chosen are they? Saul of Tarsus I don't know if he'd have been first on my list he became Paul the Apostle he was out there persecuting Christians throwing them in prison others who stammered and didn't know how to speak others who were fishermen others who were sex workers others who were out in life doing all sorts of things and yet Jesus reached out to them all people all people let us go into a world of darkness and shine his light go into a world of turmoil and be a peacemaker!

go into a world of despair and hold aloft true hope let us go into a world of cynicism and live by faith go into a world of confusion and point to the truth go into a world that can be hateful and bring love let us go into a world of alienation and breathe the presence of Jesus the one mediator Amen thank you so much Tim we really appreciate that and that's given us a lot to reflect on and we're going to

spend some time responding to God's message to us now as we sing we're going to sing a song about sharing that hope in the world around us in the community around us being people who build those bridges into the community sharing that wonderful hope that we have that Jesus is the only way to fill that gap to be our mediator to be the one who brings us salvation so I invite you to stand and we're going to sing together facing a task unfinished let's praise God together a task unfinished that drives us to our knees and eat that not diminished rebukes us of full ease we who rejoice to know thee renew me for thy throne the solemn pledge we owe thee to God and make thee known where are the lords beside thee hold their unended sway their forces that defy me defy me still today with none to heed their crying for time and love and light and one that souls are dying and passing to the night we go to all the world with kingdom hope on earth no other thing has more to save but Jesus Christ our Lord has more to save us and we go to the Lord we better touch that pain in hell from the hands of those who gave their lives through claiming that Jesus died and rose what is the same commission the same glad message ours that by the same ambition to thee we live our eyes we go to all the world with kingdom hope on flood no other name has more to save but Jesus [77:05] Christ the Lord through We go to all the world with kingdom, hope, and love.

No other name has more to say than Jesus Christ the Lord. We go to all the world with kingdom, hope, and love.

No other name has more to say than Jesus Christ the Lord. As we stand, let's pray.

The Apostle Peter, whilst under arrest and put under pressure to explain his actions, said, Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Father God, as we've just sung, there is no other name other than Jesus Christ by which anyone can be saved. So help us to trust in the name of your Son, our mediator, the one who is fully human and fully God, for our own salvation.

[78:51] And help us to live our whole lives in response to what he has done for us. And help us to boldly share this hope with those around us, building bridges into our community.

In the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Do please sit down. Thank you so much for joining us. After this gathered time here, we'd love you to stay for tea and coffee downstairs and then turn left.

If you've got children, please go and collect your children before you get your refreshments. There's refreshments for the kids too. And for those who are regulars too, it would be wonderful if you can bless the leaders of those groups by helping them to clear up.

So that the leaders can get coffee before too long as well. That would be wonderful. We'd love to have a chat and to myself, any of our leaders, anyone with a lanyard or a praying hands badge, would love to sit down and have a chat with you and a pray with you about what you face in the week ahead.

God bless you and see you soon. God bless you and see you soon.