

Sunday Service ~ March 15, 2026

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” ⁴ These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. ⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.” (Psalm 42:1-5, NIV)

Let us pray.... Dear Lord, our soul pants for you this morning. We long to be in your presence. We long to worship you with others in person but today we can't, despite all our good intentions and so we come to you by ourselves this morning or with our family around us. We need you. We need you like we need our food and drink. We need your presence, your forgiveness, your love, your grace, your help and power. So give us more of you today. Let us see more of your glory as we sing our songs. Let us hear more your character as we listen to your word. Let us experience more of your goodness as we pray. And draw us closer to your people as we sing the same song, pray the same prayers, listen to the same sermon, even if we are in different locations today. Help us this day to truly worship you in spirit and in truth. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Song – Only a Holy God [Only A Holy God- City Alight - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1. Who else commands all the hosts of heaven
Who else could make every king bow down
Who else can whisper and darkness trembles
Only a Holy God
What other beauty demands such praises
What other splendour outshines the sun
What other majesty rules with justice
Only a Holy God</p> | <p>3. Who else could rescue me from my failing
Who else would offer His only Son
Who else invites me to call Him Father
Only a Holy God
Only my Holy God!</p> |
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*Come and behold Him
The One and the Only
Cry out, sing holy
Forever a Holy God
Come and worship the Holy God*

2. What other glory consumes like fire
What other power can raise the dead
What other name remains undefeated
Only a Holy God
Come and behold Him
The One and the Only
Cry out, sing holy
Forever a Holy God
Come and worship the Holy God

Bible Reading – Matthew 19:1-12 (NIV)

“When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. 3 Some Pharisees came to him

year, for the new staff he has brought to us in Audric and Jannah, for the growth in our young people and for the keenness they have to learn and grow in their faith and for all those who served us up front and behind the scenes during the year.

Pray for Phoebe Baldwin. Praise God that I have been able to start teaching two Scripture classes this year. Pray that I will grow in confidence as I teach both classes and that I will be a good witness both to the kids and the classroom teacher. Pray for the Quiz Worx team during the Easter season. Thank God for our three volunteers this season and pray that the season will run smoothly. Please pray for God's provision so that I can be financially supported this year and can continue serving with Quiz Worx.

Pray for Nigeria. (Population 235 million, Christians 107 million) Christians in Nigeria suffer significant and severe persecution to such a degree that, for several years, Nigeria has been the most violent place in the world for believers. Pray that God brings peace to Nigeria and gives hope and stability to displaced Christians. That Nigeria's government will do everything possible to protect people from violence. That God changes the hearts of officials and those who inflict violence on His people.

Pray that God would grant wisdom to those in federal, state, and local government so they may govern with fairness, restrain wrongdoing, & promote justice and peace for all people. Pray that God would curb hatred, retaliation, and division, and instead cultivate patience, humility, and neighbourly love among Australians of every ethnicity and religion. Ask that Christians would model the peace of Christ—speaking truth with grace, refusing to be drawn into hostility, and demonstrating the reconciling power of the gospel in a divided world.

Song – Standing on the Promises

[Christian Gospel Choir - Standing On The Promises \[with lyrics\] - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1. Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let His praises ring,
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.</p> | <p>3. Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,
Bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord,
Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,
Standing on the promises of God.</p> |
| <p>Chorus</p> | <p><i>Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.</i></p> |
| <p>2. Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.</p> | <p>4. Standing on the promises I cannot fall,
Listening every moment to the Spirit's call
Resting in my Savior as my all in all,
Standing on the promises of God.</p> |

Sermon – Faithful words for a fractured world! (Stephen T)

There are some Bible passages that warm the heart. And there are some passages that tighten the chest. Matthew 19 is both. Because here Jesus speaks about marriage, divorce, & singleness. He talks to us about some of the most important issues and relationships that we face in this life. Which means he talking to us about real stories of real people. Stories of joy. Stories of regret. Stories of loneliness. Stories of betrayal. Stories of quiet faithfulness.

And He does so not hurt but to help. Not to judge but to warn. Not because he wants to dredge up the past but because he wants to help you and I with the future.

Now right at the very beginning, I do want to say this will not be easy passage for any of us, especially for those who have had firsthand experience of difficult marriages and divorce. But as we preach through the book of Matthew, here we are. God wants to speak to us on this issue, so we need to listen and listen carefully to what the Lord has to say. But let's firstly pray and ask for God's help and wisdom as we proceed...

Now in addressing the dilemma around divorce, John Stott says we need to understand *“the tension between our prophetic role to bear witness to God’s revealed standards & yet to also realise our responsibility to show compassion to those who are unable to maintain such standards”* So we need to be both prophetic & compassionate! So, let’s begin by looking at

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1. The Problem (verses 1-3)

“When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. 3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

Let’s notice the context. Jesus is travelling around the countryside, ministering to people. Healing the sick. Reaching out to the lost. Teaching them about the gospel. Meanwhile the Pharisees are meeting behind closed doors in order to find a way of getting rid of him.

And Jesus is ministering, in the region of Judea across the Jordan. That is in King Herod’s territory. This is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who had baby boys killed at the time of Jesus’ birth. The same King Herod who just a few years back had divorced his own wife and married Herodias who happened to be his brother’s ex-wife. So, Jesus had better be careful, very careful.

Especially as last year his cousin John the Baptist had lost his head because he had spoken up against King Herod’s actions. So, while there the Pharisees see their chance to trap Jesus. Would Jesus have the guts to follow John’s lead and plainly speak about divorce?

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This was political dynamite but it was also theological dynamite as well because in the last century or so this topic had become a hot potato for the Jewish people. There were two main schools of rabbinic thought. Rabbi Shammai said you can only divorce someone if they had committed adultery, but Rabbi Hillel had said you could divorce them if they displeased you in any way, even if you didn’t like their cooking!

So, who would Jesus support in this raging controversy? In reply, Jesus points everyone back to the Word of God. This reminds us that when we have a tricky question before us, the first thing we need to do is to hear what God’s word has to say to us on it. But notice that before Jesus answers their question about divorce, he needed to lay the ground work and talk firstly about God’s view on marriage. So, he moves from the problem to

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2. The Principle (verses 4-6)

4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

What is Jesus saying? He’s insisting that we firstly get our view of marriage right. Marriage is God’s idea. So, weddings may take different forms in different cultures, but behind each Christian marriage, God has embedded four important principles.

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#1 Marriage involves an exclusive man-woman relationship. God made mankind in two sexes, male and female. Equal but different. And complementary. With the aim that when, a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, they become one flesh. Now this has been the accepted norm for almost

all of the world's history but in recent time this principle has been discredited. But remember Jesus is taking us back to basics, back to the manufacturer's instructions. Marriage is firstly an exclusive man-women relationship.

Where, principle #2, at some public event, the man "leaves his parents". There is a breaking of that family tie for all to see. Thirdly he removes himself from one set of relationships to start another relationship by cleaving to his wife. This is a permanent move. And lastly it is consummated by sexual intercourse, because the two become one flesh, and in that act, God weaves them together in a way that where mankind should not be separating what God has joined together.

One person has put it this way. "Marriage is like 2 potatoes: you're skinned alive, put in hot water and then mashed together into 1!" So that's the principle. And one we just have to get into our heads. God's ideal for marriage is permanent. Till death do us part. Where the man and the woman are no longer two but one.

This is the closest relationship that we are to have as human beings. Children might be connected to their parents through a shared DNA but once married, the husband and wife are fused together to form a single, indivisible unit. Kids are separate entities. A married couple is not. For God has made them one. $1 + 1 = 1$. So, marriage is not a 50/50 proposition, it is a 100/100 one. So, there is an intimacy and a permanency about marriage.

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For marriage is for life. "*Therefore, what God has joined together let man not separate.*" It is an act of God. A union where the service is conducted here on earth but it's sealed in heaven. Now I wonder if you noticed how many times the word Unity appears in these 3 verses? It's 5 times. God brings them together; mankind shouldn't tear them apart.

This is where the Church has to be prophetic. It needs to point us all back to God's high view of marriage. Our society might make laws and lower the standards for marriage and enable those who are unhappy a pathway out of their marriage but we need to keep teaching our people how to build healthier and stronger marriages based on God's principles for marriage. And we need to be much better at supporting and strengthening those whose marriages are struggling or in trouble.

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How do we do that? If we are currently married, we start there. Every marriage will have some rocky patches, but if we are in this for life, we need to give our marriages the time and effort that they need. Quite simply they have to take higher priorities in our life than maybe they currently take. We need to nurture our spouse. Repent of our sins quickly. Forgive deeply. And if we are engaged or dating you need to ask yourself, not is this person compatible but am I prepared to be faithful to this person, no matter what comes our way?

Also, when difficulties arise within our married friends, we need to help them work through them. We need to remind them of their need to forgive, to work hard on reconciliation. Yes, separation might be necessary for a time but that should be a time where they are working at dealing with the issues that are causing conflict with the long-term view of getting back together again.

At the same time, we need to support our unmarried friends at Church. Being single is a tough gig. They need deep friendships to encourage them through the many ups & downs of life. We need to encourage them to only date and marry Christians, as the Bible tells them. But if they don't follow the Bible's advice, we need to work hard to build relationships with their partners in the hope that God might be gracious to them & turn them to Christ.

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3. The problem, the principle and thirdly **the permission (verses 7-9)**

But despite all our best efforts sometimes our marriages will end in divorce. So, are there any circumstances where a marriage has become broken in God's eyes? Where Christians are allowed to get divorced? And is there any chance they can get remarried? That is the question that the Pharisees are asking Jesus and that is the issue he now turns to.

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7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

Yes, God did make an accommodation in the time of Moses for the hardness of people's hearts. Living with sinful people can be damaging, very damaging. Especially to the women of Moses' day. If they were just abandoned by the one whose job was to look after them and provide for them and protect them, they would find themselves incredibly vulnerable.

Incredibly vulnerable. So, in Deuteronomy 24 we read that she can obtain a certificate of divorce which means she has the ability to start again. To find someone new. Not to be a social leper but be granted the protection of the society as a whole so that she no longer stays under the influence of a man who doesn't want to provide for her and protect her.

"Because your hearts were hard." This is amazing. It implies, that there are laws in the Old Testament that are not expressions of God's will for all time, but expressions of how best to manage sin in a particular people at a particular time. So, friends, divorce is never commanded in the OT. But it was permitted & regulated—like polygamy and some forms of slavery were permitted and regulated,. And Jesus says here that this permission shows that marriage is not the problem but the hardness of the human heart is the real problem.

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But are there any grounds where divorce is permitted? Jesus continues, *"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."*

There is one situation that Jesus states where divorce is permissible. One thing that destroys the one flesh arrangement of a marriage so deeply that it may not ever be able to be put together. Marital unfaithfulness. Porneia, it is in the original Greek. And that word means any form of sexual immorality that takes place outside of the marriage.

So, if one partner has an affair, or goes to a prostitute or rapes or sexually abuses another that so destroys the original idea of one flesh, the two becoming one, that divorce for the innocent party becomes a real option. Yes, Jesus stresses marriage & not divorce, reconciliation not separation. But if there is marital unfaithfulness, and only in that case, the innocent party should be allowed to divorce & subsequently remarry

Now that's pretty hard to hear, isn't it? That's against our society's view of a no-fault divorce. It also means that the guilty party may not be allowed to remarry at all. And the innocent party can only remarry under the strictest of circumstances, marital unfaithfulness.

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Now to make it even a bit more complicated, the Bible allows a further exception in the book of 1 Corinthians. There the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, applying Jesus' words to the missionary context that he found himself in, allows another exception for divorce. ¹²*"To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer & she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her..."* ¹⁵*But if*

the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace."

Paul says, if you are a non-Christian, married to another non-Christian and if you become a Christian and they don't and because of your faith in Jesus the other party cannot stand to stay with you and leaves you, then you are allowed to divorce and remarry **but only if you marry another Christian**. Once again, Paul doesn't say you have to get a divorce. God would love the marriage to stay together. But if you have been deserted by your non-Christian partner, there is almost no way you can keep the marriage together anyway and so Paul says that this is the second allowance that God gives against the permanency of marriage.

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Now I'm not pretending that this is easy teaching. There is much pain in a broken marriage, there is much pain if you stay together in a difficult marriage. I have had many, many sessions with people who are going through difficult times and the issues are complex and the pain is deep, very deep. It might seem that the best option is to break up and start again with someone else. It might look the easier option to get a divorce. But there are no easy options. And the best option you can have is to listen to God's word today and to draw upon the reserves of wisdom, help and strength that are available to us through Jesus Christ.

But what if you are in an abusive situation? That isn't covered by either of the exceptions that we have talked about. Does this mean you need to stay? No, I don't believe it does. Get out now. Find a safe place for you and your family. Too often, the Church has not spoken clearly on this. Wise Christian counselling can help; being in Christian community is important. But this passage is not saying you have to stay in that abusive situation.

But it may mean you can't get a divorce either. Separate, leave, find support, strength, encouragement. Fill yourselves with God's teaching & find your help with us in this Church. Don't stay. Get help. Help for yourself. Help for your kids. Help for your marriage partner. Maybe there will be true repentance, maybe not. It's tricky, I know because people can make all sorts of promises. But remember you made your vows to them. Your commitment now is not to live with them but to pray for repentance & a change of behaviour. And they might never do that. And so that might mean remaining separated for good. But we must take our vows seriously and divorce is only permitted in exceptional circumstances.

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Friends the gospel is not just for the faithfully married. It is also for the one struggling with an unhappy marriage. Or who has been divorced previously from a difficult marriage. And we will find out in our last point it is also for the single, who have never been married. The gospel of God's amazing grace is not for the perfect but for the repentant and the broken. Which means the good news of Jesus is for all.

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4. So, what are the Pastoral implications? (verses 10-12)

*10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."
11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others & there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."*

God's high view of marriage, for the disciples, raises another possibility. Singleness. Now in those days & even in today's world, singleness was seen as a second-class option. Marriage is the gold standard & if you can't find a suitable partner, people assume there is something wrong with you. But Jesus rejects that sort of narrative.

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For God has a high view of marriage and God also has a high view of singleness as well. Don't forget Jesus was single, he never married. Nor did some of the heroes of my faith like John Stott, Corrie ten Boom, Peter Adam, Florence Nightingale. The Church misses the point when we make marriage the main game, the be all and end all. For Jesus says the kingdom of God will be made up of three groups of people who will be single.

Firstly, you can be born with some sort of condition that keeps you from being able to have marital relations and so requires a form of singleness. It might be a physical ailment or a mental or emotional one. But many, many Christians are born in a way that will make marriage difficult, even impossible. And yet they are no less a child of God, are they?

Then there are people who have been made eunuchs by others. You remember in the near East, there were cultures where men would have the job of looking over the harem, and so they would actually be physically mutilated in order that they might be "trusted" to be in charge of a whole harem of women. So, others are mutilated by man. Today that might happen through an unwanted sexual experience imposed on you that is not your fault. Or a major trauma in life caused by others that stops you from any form of intimacy.

And then there are some Christians who choose to remain single. Christians who decide that they want to serve God and so will choose to forgo marriage so that they can serve the Lord without the distraction of home and family. The kingdom of God is so important to these people they are willing to give up something that the world highly prizes because they prize something even more, serving the Lord with everything that they have.

Of course, other Christians are single not by their own choice. They would love to get married but the right person hasn't come along or even more heart breaking they did come along but didn't seem to notice them. To be honest I thought that was me. I didn't get married until I was 32, after all my friends had got married. But before that I found things incredibly tough. What's wrong with me, I would ask. Yes, I want to service the Lord but I also want to find the right girl to serve the Lord with. I had to keep my eyes on the Lord and keep serving him. I was fortunate that Kaylene came along. But I know many others where that never happens. They keep serving the Lord but with a constant ache in their hearts.

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So pastorally we need care for our single men and women. Those who are young, those who are middle aged and those who are retired. We can't forget our widows and widowers. Include them in our families. Give them a wide circle of networks. Get beside them when they are feeling lonely. And encourage them to keep putting the gospel first & everything else second. Support them to help maximise their singleness to advance the good news of Jesus in the lives of those around them.

And it means we need to pastorally care for the divorced. Whether it was their fault or the other person's fault or a bit of both. We need to point them back to the forgiveness we can find in the Lord Jesus. And remind them that as part of the Church they are married to Christ and will enjoy that incredible union for the rest of their eternity.

And for our married people we need to help them through the ups and downs of married life. Remind them that their marriages can point others to the love of God and can model godly sacrifice for the other as well as godly submission.

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I suppose I want to leave you with one last thought. It is from Jer 3:8 where God says *"I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery"*.

Jeremiah uses the language of divorce metaphorically to describe how God's people were unfaithful to him. But in the midst of his pain, God pursues, restores, and promises a new covenant. Which means that God can say to you and I: "I've been through all the humiliation of being rejected." God says: "I know all about the pain of betrayal." God says: "I know all about the anguish of broken vows from hard-hearted people". Which is why the cross is so important to us. For at the cross, Jesus bears the judgment that our spiritual adultery deserves — so that reconciliation, not permanent separation, becomes the final word. And the price paid to achieve that sort of reconciliation was one blood stained cross.

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You see Jesus has not walked away from his bride the Church. Jesus has not abandoned us. Jesus has continued to hold out his love to you and me. He always takes the Church back when she wanders. He always is patient with her. He always cares for her and provides for her and protects her and, wonder of wonders, delights in her. And you—you who are married once, married five times, married never—if you repent and trust Christ—you are part of that bride. So, whether you are married or divorced or single, put him first. Serve him with gladness. For your union with Christ is deeper than marriage, longer than marriage, and more secure than marriage. For it will last for eternity.

Song – All my ways

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44mVzqGeS-Q>

In days of peace and days of rest
In times of loss and loneliness
Though rich or poor, Your word is true
That all my ways are known to You

I do not fear the final night
For death will be the door to life
You take my hand and lead me through
For all my ways are known to You

No trial has come beyond Your hand
No step I walk beyond Your plan
The path is dark outside my view
Still all my ways are known to You

Chorus

Chorus
And oh what peace that I have found
Wherever I may be
For all my ways are known to You
Hallelujah, they are known to You!

Bridge x4
Open up my eyes so I may see
That You have made these ways for me

Chorus x

Benediction. "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy". (Jude 24)